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ADOLPH SUTRO

# THE BIG BONANZA


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*The Story of the Comstock Lode*

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*By*  
C. B. GLASSCOCK

*Illustrated*

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY  
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*To*

CHRIS AND MARIE

In memory of a journey to the Comstock





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## THE BIG BONANZA



# THE BIG BONANZA

## CHAPTER I

### THE STAGE IS SET

IN Storey County, Nevada, a few miles southeast of Reno, a barren mountain lifts its head amid a weary monotony of desert hills.

Through the valley at the mountain's foot come a few rough-clad white men, passing wearily. Next comes a dusty caravan of covered wagons, groaning slowly westward. A weary group stops beside a feeble river and buries a mother and child, dead from the hardships of the long journey. The travelers slaughter a footsore ox, rest for a day or two and move on. The pioneers of that long trail from East to West ignore the mountain.

A begging Piute squaw tells them it is Sun Peak. What of that? It is a poor insignificant mountain compared with those they have surmounted back yonder in the Great Rockies. They ignore it and turn their eyes upon the high Sierras, beckoning to the end of their journey.

The weeks go by, and other caravans and groups of men and animals appear out of the desert wastes to the eastward, wind slowly through the valley of



the Carson, camp, and trudge on toward their goal amid the new-famed California gold-fields.

So among the plodding emigrants appeared a weary group with a dozen saddle-horses and a few ox-teams. They had toiled across the plains from St. Louis to the Rocky Mountains, and across the mountains to the western desert. They were ragged and unkempt, long of limb, stooped of shoulder, dull of eye. All, save one.

That one was a boy of eighteen years. But eighteen years could mean manhood in 1849 when the gold-rush to California gave youth a trial. This was a broad-shouldered boy, with dark curling hair above a fine forehead, deep-set shrewd eyes under well-marked brows, a strong nose, a straight firm mouth which curled easily into a smile or set as quickly in lines of grim determination above the jaw of a fighter. He was James Graham Fair, born in Clogher, County Tyrone, Ireland, of a Scottish mother and an Irish father. He had been in America six years, at school and at work in rural Illinois. Though still a boy in years he stood out among these emigrants like an oak among bending willows.

He was master of his party. He had proved it in both diplomacy and strength. Near Salt Lake City the weary party had camped upon the plain. Wagons were drawn up in a square, horses hobbled, oxen turned loose to graze. The slatternly women of the party were cooking a meager supper over fires of twigs and buffalo chips when a cloud of dust ap-

peared upon the horizon and bore down upon the camp. Alarmed, the men herded in their horses and gathered within the square of their wagons, with weapons ready to hand.

They had crossed mountain and plain without trouble from the Indians, but they could take no chances. They had heard from returning stragglers that here in Utah the Mormons were treating travelers with scant courtesy. They trembled at the approach of the little band of horsemen. Fair, though a boy, did not tremble. Instead, he assumed command and when he saw that the approaching group numbered fewer than the men in his own party, invited them courteously to stop and share the rough meal which was being prepared. The strangers accepted. In the course of the meal they began to speak of the Mormons in most uncomplimentary terms. Before his associates could agree, Fair spoke.

"Pardon me, gentlemen; it pains me to hear you speak so of a worthy people. Many Mormons whom I met in Missouri were good men, peace loving, honest and industrious. It will be time enough to think ill of them when they have given me cause."

The strangers exchanged glances, and changed the subject. The next day Fair recognized several of the men in the streets of Salt Lake City, apparently at home. He had sized them up correctly and acted with a shrewd diplomacy worthy of a much older and more experienced man. His party had no cause to complain of ill treatment either in the Mormon

stronghold or on the continued journey across the desert.

So James Graham Fair traveled cheerfully through the Carson Valley, giving no more thought than the thousands of other emigrants to the barren peak jutting up from the Washoe Mountains to the northward. Once across the Sierras he bent his strong back eagerly over shovel and rocker in the California placers. The reward at first was meager, but his enthusiasm and energy were great. Two years went by and he had gained nothing but experience. Then he joined with an older man named Talton Caldwell in working a placer prospect at Shaw's Flat in Calaveras County.

Sweat and experience continued to be his only reward until curiosity stirred within him at the spectacle of a group of Chileans who passed his cabin occasionally and always returned in a few hours with enough gold dust to finance a spree at the main camp below. Fair trailed the party and found their diggings in a creek bottom.

Immediately, with Caldwell, he located adjoining ground, set up his rocker and shoveled in sand and gravel. Within a few weeks the partners stripped the sand-bar down to bedrock. Their takings, weighed in at the nearest gold scales, came to one hundred and eighty thousand dollars.

James G. Fair, who was to attain fame and fortune, was on the road to greatness in his early twenties. He had been on that road several years earlier when he

passed Sun Peak, later Mount Davidson, in the Washoe Mountains. But like thousands of overland travelers to California he had passed that desolate treasure-house in ignorance. His was a long road which would lead him back eventually to that same despised mountain and reward him with as many millions in silver as he now boasted thousands in gold.

In the meantime he was young, filled with energy, enthusiasm, laughter and the joy of life. So, moving from Shaw's Flat to Angels' Camp, he met and married Theresa Rooney, proprietress of the leading boarding-house in Carson Hills. For a time he remained in the placer mines. He was in interesting company, whether or not he recognized it. In mine and camp and straggling town scattered along the western slopes of the Sierras and on to Sacramento, Stockton and San Francisco were other young men of similar character, energy and ambition, who were to be his associates, his friends or his enemies, and always factors in his fortune.

John William Mackay, also an Irish immigrant boy, some four years younger than Fair, was at work in another camp. Unlike Fair, he had not passed the foot of historic Mount Davidson. Working as a lad in a ship-builder's office in New York, whither he had come from Dublin, Mackay also was caught by the gold fever. The sea, even broken by the pestilential jungles of Panama, appeared to him a better route to the gold-fields than that across the continent. He came to San Francisco by ship.

The route was of minor importance. Any route to the California gold-fields in those days was a bitter test of a man's purpose and stamina. Young Mackay was equal to its trials. With pick and shovel in a hand more accustomed to wielding a pen, he plodded up the gulches of Sierra County and bent to his task. More than a decade of bitter experience went to the strengthening of his back and the hardening of his hands and his purpose before he was to look upon the treasure-house below Mount Davidson. A hard school was needed to prepare him for the great days and great duties to come. He learned its lessons by the sweat of his brow.

And in the meantime James C. Flood, of stock and stamina similar to that of Mackay and Fair, but born in New York, and trained in the psychology still evident in Wall Street or Broadway, was studying the ways of the West with greater native shrewdness than either Mackay or Fair. Flood, twenty-three years old, landed on the plank streets of San Francisco with the first rush by sea in 1849. He was not long in deciding that he might cultivate both wisdom and capital more successfully from a high point of observation than from the bottom of a gulch.

A fourth Irishman, William S. O'Brien, agreed with Flood. Shrewdly studying and analyzing, the two men definitely rejected pick and shovel on the sand-bars of the placer streams in favor of towel and bottle on the mahogany bar of a saloon strategically placed near the site of San Francisco's mining stock ex-

change. Flood saved his hands and used his brains.

The leading mining men of the day and place, warmed to the proper point by the excellent liquors served by the firm of Flood & O'Brien, were his instructors not only in the theory of mining but in the practise of the high finance and promotion which has always led mining profits by several shovel-lengths.

The faculty of this practical university of the mahogany bar included such savants as James R. Keene, Darius Ogden Mills, Solomon Hydenfeldt, James B. Haggin, John W. Gashwiler and John T. Bradley. The saloon of Flood & O'Brien became a forum for the dissemination of the concentrated wisdom and experience of the shrewdest mining men, market operators, promoters and bankers of the day. It was no squalid pothouse, no rendezvous of roistering miners, drunken Sydneymen and painted percentage girls. Flood & O'Brien saw to that. Flood wanted his information and education from the fountain heads, warmed perhaps by his hospitality but never diluted.

How carefully he listened, how well he learned, and how shrewdly he applied his education is history which will be set down with its proof in the course of this narrative. Without that wisely won course in high finance, illustrated by the daily experience of those who gave it, even the energy, ambition and practical skill of Fair and Mackay probably would not have produced and retained the fortunes which are still a factor in the economic and social life of America.

Flood was to become the financial expert as Fair and Mackay were to be the mining experts, and O'Brien a more or less silent partner of the company of Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien, to go down in history as the bonanza kings of the Comstock.

A varied and versatile directorate is needed for the successful operation of a business so vast as the business at the foot of Mount Davidson was to become. An inscrutable Fate seemed to be preparing this directorate in the golden days of California in the 'fifties. Each of the four, unknown to the other, had traveled thousands of miles, by barren desert, by the stormy seas around the Horn, across the fever-ridden jungles and mountains of Panama to meet and make history upon a desolate hillside.

But such history is no one-man or even four-man tale. Such a story needs its villain, its hero and its lovers. And these also were preparing while the future bonanza kings were mopping a damp brow or a damp bar.

William Sharon, destined to be the founder and chief of the greatest monopoly ever known in the United States up to his day, had already passed the foot of Mount Davidson, as unsuspecting and indifferent to the scene of his future fame as the youthful James G. Fair. A man of parts was Sharon, shrewd, ambitious, ruthless, daring. Trained in the law, he was a man of education far superior to that of most of the residents of California in those early days. But there was little practise of law in the gold dig-

gings. Each camp made and posted its own "rules and regulations," and enforced them as it saw fit. So Sharon, having no aptitude for pick and shovel and little respect for the second greatest activity of the frontier, the liquor business, turned to real estate. In it he won and lost a small fortune. He demanded a large one, and was prepared to make it. How he did so may make him either a hero or the villain of this history, as the reader chooses.

Other men as important to the budding drama were there. Adolph Sutro, later to be branded by many leaders of the Comstock as the real villain of the piece, but lifted to a hero's pedestal in the memories of many persons still living, was an insignificant young merchant in San Francisco. He had come from his birthplace in Aix-la-Chapelle to New York in 1850 at the age of twenty. It was an age peculiarly susceptible to the gold fever, and Sutro had promptly taken another ship and crossed the Isthmus to the new land of opportunity.

Thwarted in his first search for gold, Sutro continued unwavering in ambition and energy. Neither miner, bartender, lawyer nor realtor, Sutro survived the disappointments and difficulties of the rough life of the frontier, bending to each storm, but never breaking. Born of a race which centuries of persecution had served not to destroy but to strengthen in pride and purpose, he was indomitable.

The hard school of the frontier drove him to make scientific research into better methods of reclaiming



the treasure which was being lost in the crude rockers, pans and sluices of the time. His practical studies were supported by a compelling intellectual curiosity. Since childhood he had been a student. His education improved with his experience. His character toughened to the needs of his environment. Disappointment did not dull but stimulated his ambition.

Ten years of this made him a man to be reckoned with. How seriously he was to be reckoned with, in the face of rebuffs and opposition such as perhaps no other man in the history of the West has ever met and conquered, is an amazing part of this true record. His name is still engraved, literally, upon the Comstock, for the traveler to see below the crumbling slopes of Mount Davidson.

Still others were being assembled for the drama by an unseen casting director, and each schooled for a part. William M. Stewart, John P. Jones, D. O. Mills, "Lucky" Baldwin, coming by way of Cape Horn, the Isthmus of Panama, or through the barren valley of the Carson River below Mount Davidson, "have their exits and their entrances." Even a chorus, a ballet, low comedians, hoofers, and "ladies and gentlemen of the ensemble" were gathering.

And as with any well-staged drama or pageant, even a publicity department, critics and commentators were being gathered to praise and flay, to review and record.

Mark Twain presently was on his way to loll lazily against the backdrop of Mount Davidson while the



HENRY THOMAS PAIGE COMSTOCK

"Old Pancake," for whom the Comstock Lode of Nevada was named.



SENATOR JOHN P. JONES

Who rejuvenated Virginia City through his discovery of the rich Crown Point bonanza in 1871.



*Courtesy Bancroft Library.*

WILLIAM S. O'BRIEN



*Courtesy Bancroft Library.*

JOHN W. MACKAY



stage carpenters built their shaft-houses, their "gal-lows frames," their shacks, saloons, livery stables, stamp mills and other appurtenances of a mining town preparing for high finance, fight and frolic.

First as plain Sam Clemens, late of the Mississippi River, noted even among the unkempt frontiersmen for the studied disarray of a slouch hat upon a wild bush of hair, flannel shirt and clay-smeared breeches stuffed carelessly into cowhide boots, he lounged about the set, preparing himself subconsciously for his part. Gradually his lazy satisfaction in the hectic scenes about him succumbed to the mad energy of the time. The feverish struggle for wealth which had assembled the principals of the drama caught up even the indifferent spectator. Tolerant amusement at the madness about him was succeeded by as high a fever of his own. No man could escape that contagion. Sam Clemens was rushing in a frenzy to each new "strike," locating claims, gambling in "feet," sweating with pick and shovel in prospect holes, freezing in sodden blankets under a lowering sky, hungry, elated, thirsty, dejected, eager, alive.

But as a miner Sam Clemens proved himself to be an excellent story-teller. And despite his bitter disappointments the drama was still comedy to him. As "Josh" he began to set down incidents of the play in print. *The Territorial Enterprise* proved a rare school for his genius. Its editor allowed "Josh's" imagination free play. It is doubtful that in later life he would have been proud of the crudities in

which he joyed at that moment. But then he was part and parcel of a life distinguished by its crudity. He was proud of his work. He gloried in it.

He felt that he must attain better identification, more distinction. The name "Josh," was too commonplace. He felt that he must sign his effusions with a pen-name far more distinctive. Pseudonyms were the fashion among the writers of that time. Sam Clemens sought for one outstanding, and at last abandoned Josh, and announced himself to readers of *The Enterprise* as "Mark Twain." It was not an original name. An old river pilot of the Mississippi had used it, but had died without giving it fame. The two words, sung out by a leadsman in a difficult channel, had always a pleasant connotation for a pilot. They meant two fathoms—safe water. Josh became Mark Twain.

He was not alone in his labors. More valuable in fact if not in fancy was William Wright, known and long honored among the miners of the West as Dan DeQuille. Joseph Goodman, proprietor of *The Enterprise*, Arthur McEwen, C. C. Goodwin and Sam Davis were others, eager and able to report the drama, both grave and gay.

So the stage was set, the actors trained for their parts, and the critics and the chroniclers prepared for the big bonanza, a drama full of sound and fury, and signifying much. The play can never be forgotten, though the playhouse after only half a century lies in ruins.

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A once busy city, the greatest mining town upon the continent, is literally sinking into the earth which gave it birth—ashes to ashes and dust to dust. The iron doors of the Wells-Fargo Express office, through which passed five hundred million dollars in bullion, sag drunkenly in a wall which threatens daily to crash upon the other ruined walls behind. A few graybeards eye a passing tourist and spit into the street from beneath which, half a century ago, they took coin silver with their picks from dripping steaming walls, or fled in panic from such subterranean fires as might rival the terrors of Vesuvius.

## CHAPTER II

### FROM THE MORMONS TO THE MINES

THE Mormon Church, just coming into power at Salt Lake City, had been looking upon California with calculating eyes. Brigham Young and his elders were dreaming of a nation of their own which would stretch from western Wyoming and Colorado to the coast of Oregon and California. In the midst of their dream they were awakened by the cry of "Gold!" in California. They had scarcely rubbed the sleep from their eyes when the throngs of adventurers began to stream through the Mormon capital to the land of promise. Then they saw clearly, and acted swiftly.

The tents and cabins of thousands of bold but heretical Americans dotted the land west of the Sierras. The Latter-Day Saints realized that much of their dream must be abandoned. They could, however, materialize the rest. So they organized the State of Deseret, comprising what is now Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and parts of Wyoming, Colorado and southern California. Immediately they set out to colonize this great area. One of their newly established stations was in the Carson Valley. There a settler washed out a little gold, which was reported promptly to the elders.

The next year a Mormon emigrant train, camping in Carson Valley to rest and recuperate their animals, devoted a little time to prospecting. They discovered a little gold at the mouth of what later became known as Gold Canyon. Knowing nothing of geology, they did not understand the significance of the deposit there. They abandoned the search shortly for what they believed to be greater opportunity beyond the Sierras. But snow in the mountains drove the party back to Carson Valley, where William Prouse, Nicholas Kelly and John Orr passed the time by continuing a casual search for gold. Orr in fact dug a nugget from a crevice in the rocks and was sufficiently thrilled to christen the place Gold Canyon. He failed to appreciate that gold in the canyon indicated a source of far greater riches higher up the slopes.

With the advance of summer and the opening of the passes across the mountains the entire party of Mormons moved on into California. In the meantime Congress refused to accept the Deseret boundaries as specified by the Mormon Church, and the elders were confirmed in their decision that they must control the area by colonization. A second station was established in Carson Valley, and a second time the lure of gold destroyed it.

Instead of going on to California, however, as their predecessors had done, these Mormon settlers and their hangers-on merely neglected their barren little farms to search for gold in the near-by Washoe Hills. One by one they strayed up Gold Canyon with pick



and pan. Among them was a drunken, irresponsible teamster later known in the history of the West as James Finney or Fennimore, otherwise "Old Virginia," for his habit of boasting of his native state.

Thus for several years the mining interests in Gold Canyon continued to thwart the agricultural and political interests of the Mormon Church in the Carson Valley below. But there seemed to be no such gold and no such opportunity as had brought thousands to California. The settlement in Gold Canyon seldom boasted more than one hundred inhabitants. And this number dwindled to less than a dozen each year as the advancing summer dried the feeble streams and made placer mining impossible. Even when production was at its height, few men could earn more than five dollars a day. The average was about two. This was not especially attractive in a country where flour occasionally went to two and one-half dollars a pound, and potatoes cost almost as much.

Still the miners and the Mormons struggled on until in 1857 Brigham Young abandoned his part of the enterprise and recalled all settlers to Salt Lake City. Four thousand of the Latter-Day Saints were gathered up by eighteen hundred ox-teams sent out to remote sections of the desert throughout the West. Production of gold from the pans and rockers of the Gold Canyon miners had fallen to one-tenth of its best year's record. The desolate Carson Valley was abandoned, with its cabins, sawmills, truck farms, mining claims and water ditches.

Three weeks after the Prophet's messengers had sounded the recall throughout the desert, four hundred and fifty Carson Valley Mormons, forming a cattle and wagon train two miles long, were plodding back to Salt Lake City. Three years later Orson Hyde, Mormon apostle, wrote to the owners of a sawmill he had erected and abandoned in the Washoe Valley. His letter reveals the first appreciation of the error of the Mormon Church. After demanding restoration of the abandoned property, Apostle Hyde concluded:

"This demand of ours remaining uncanceled shall be to the people of Carson and Wassau Valleys as was the Ark of God among the Philistines. You shall be visited by the Lord of Hosts with thunder and with earthquakes, with floods, with pestilence and with famine, until your names are not known among men."

In part the prophecy was fulfilled. Fire and flood and pestilence did indeed visit the district. But between these visitations of the Apostle's vengeful Lord of Hosts came other things which Hyde had coveted for himself but had failed to prophesy—riches, power, luxury. Even the nickname of the worthless, drunken and heretical James Finney, Old Virginia, promises to live as long as that of the bearded prophet himself.

In the meantime, however, the Washoe district, abandoned as worthless desert by the Mormons, was

in need of some form of government. A few sturdy men still prospected, mined and farmed in the vicinity. The Utah authorities, then farther away than is Tokio at this moment, still claimed jurisdiction for election, revenue and judicial purposes. The registration records of mining claims had been removed by the retiring Mormons. The remaining inhabitants were cut off from Salt Lake City by six hundred miles of burning desert in summer, from California by the impassable snows of the Sierras in winter.

The men of the region were such men as might be expected to inhabit a land of rock and sand and sagebrush swept from season to season by hot sand-blasts and bitter blizzards, wresting a little gold from the gravel, a meager crop of beans from the bottomlands, and sustaining life upon these beans, bacon, flapjacks and whisky. The worst of them settled their differences and established their rights in personal encounters with knife and pistol. The best of them petitioned Congress to form the Territory of Nevada, and provide a government. This in due time was done.

But before its accomplishment, western Utah had lost even the momentary importance which it had enjoyed through the Mormon trading posts on the main travel route to California placer mines. The California placers appeared to be nearing exhaustion in the late 'fifties. Travel through the Carson Valley had decreased to one-tenth of the maximum which it had reached in 1854. Chinese laborers had taken the

abandoned claims and farms of the whites at the original "Mormon Station," on Carson River. The settlement had even come to be identified as Chinatown, much to the disgust of the few whites who remained, and who advised the occasional travelers that the town was "Mineral Rapids." The name failed to register. They changed it to "Nevada City." That too failed. In the days of its resurgence, however, it became Dayton, and that name remains upon the maps of western Nevada, though the town itself has almost vanished.

The real center of activity in the district was John-town, a settlement of a dozen shanties and a score of huts, tents and dugouts, located some four miles from Dayton, up Gold Canyon. There in the shadow of Sun Peak, later identified in government maps as Mount Davidson, a hundred miners wielded pick and shovel, pan and rocker, to extract a meager living from the earth. From this primitive settlement they wandered into adjacent canyons upon the slopes of Mount Davidson, taking a pokeful of dust here and there along the gravel bottoms. Up Gold Canyon on the south side of Mount Davidson they worked. Up Six-Mile Canyon to the eastward they labored, stripping the surface of such gold as their pans and rockers might reveal, but apparently never realizing that this gold must have come from a richer source in the decomposed outcroppings above.

From month to month as they ascended the slopes their gold became less fine. The bankers in Placer-

ville, California, who bought the dust, reduced the price gradually from eighteen to thirteen dollars an ounce, explaining that it was mixed with a growing percentage of silver. The miners complained, and still failed to understand the significance. Still they worked upward, probably because they knew of no better way to provide their beans and bacon and whisky.

On Saturday nights they gathered at Dutch Nick's saloon for the weekly dance at which the Piute princess, Sarah Winnemucca, and the three white women of Johntown provided a foretaste of the night club of to-day. On the rare days when the Placerville stage came in with the coined reward of their toil they gathered in the store of Jacob Job, the camp's only merchant, and bucked the tiger until Job had traded experience for cash and sent them back to their picks and shovels.

Among the men were names which, despite the curse of Apostle Orson Hyde, have not been forgotten. There was Henry Thomas Paige Comstock, a lanky, loud-voiced, boastful, bullying prospector with a short chin beard and a shaven upper lip which gave him a sanctimonious air entirely out of keeping with his real character. He was known familiarly as "Old Pancake," because he subsisted chiefly upon flapjacks, insisting he was always too busy to make the sour-dough bread of the miners. There was James Finney, the Old Virginia who had drifted into the region as a teamster with the Mormon expedition of

1851, and remained to become as famous as he was bibulous. There were Peter O'Riley, Patrick McLaughlin, Manny Penrod, Jack Bishop, Joe Winters, and a few other choice spirits with some claim to fame.

Less famous, as they were less infamous, but more deserving of mention because their part in the development of the district was based upon intelligent effort rather than accident, were the Grosh brothers, Ethan Allen and Hosea Ballou, sons of a Pennsylvania preacher. The brothers had gone to California by sea from Philadelphia in 1849. Failing to make more than a bare living in the placers, they drifted eastward across the Sierras into the Washoe district and began to mine in Gold Canyon. The Grosh brothers identified the first silver in the region.

Silver was a new idea to the miners of the time and place, but one which the Grosh brothers were capable of entertaining. But silver mining required capital which the mining of placer gold did not require. In search of such capital the brothers returned to California. There they obtained a grub-stake and continued their exploration of Gold Canyon. They wrote to their father that they had discovered pure silver, resembling thin sheet lead broken very fine. The gold-miners had made the same discovery but believed the metal to be lead, and threw it away with curses and contempt. Not so the Groshes. They continued to prospect for silver ore, and traced veins which their diagrams, drawn at the time, indicate

were the south end of the great Comstock deposits.

They even described the ore which years later made up the bulk of the big bonanza. "Its colors are violet-blue, indigo-blue, blue-black and greenish-black." They obtained an assay showing thirty-five hundred dollars' worth of silver to the ton of ore. That was too good to be true. But they located claims upon what apparently was the Comstock lode, and labored on with their gold rockers to earn enough money for development. At the same time they tried to interest capital. They had indeed obtained a promise of sufficient funds to open their silver claims on a commercial basis when the capitalist was murdered by desperadoes, and their hopes were dashed.

Then, when a vast fortune had been dangled before their eyes and snatched away, Hosea injured his foot with a pick. Blood-poisoning set in. Within a month he was dead. Ethan Allen Grosh, sixty dollars in debt through his brother's illness and funeral, decided once more to go to California to raise funds. But first he felt it necessary to pay off his debt. Working for wages to that end occupied him until late in November. The first snows had swept down upon the Sierras.

But Ethan Grosh and a friend, Richard Maurice Bucke, later a distinguished physician and writer in Canada, could not wait. Though the brothers had lived apart from the roisterers of Johntown and managed to keep secret their knowledge of the silver deposits, they could not be certain that the informa-

tion would remain their secret indefinitely. So Ethan Grosh and Doctor Bucke loaded a burro with supplies and started through the snow-bound mountains, more than one hundred miles from Johnstown to Placerville on the lower west slope of the Sierras.

On the first night in mountains, the burro, wiser than the men, slipped his hobbles and headed back toward the comparative comfort of the desert. Four days were wasted before the animal was found, reloaded and driven upward into a driving snow-storm. Storm followed storm as day followed day while men and burro toiled onward. In Squaw Valley at last, near the top of the western ridge, rain alternated with snow and freezing weather with thaws until the travelers, unable to move, had consumed the last of their provisions and killed the donkey for food.

On crude snowshoes they climbed again, only to be lost in the drifts and driven back to their pitiful refuge. Again they tried, and reached a mountain cabin beyond the summit. And again the snows closed down upon them. Outside movement would have been suicide. They remained until even their donkey meat was almost gone. Matches and gunpowder had been ruined by the dampness. The two men threw away everything, and ran for their lives, stumbling, falling and sliding down the steep slopes. At night they burrowed in the snow for shelter. For four days they continued in this frozen wilderness until at last they came upon a snow-bound mining camp.



Their feet were frozen, their eyes snow-blinded, their stomachs unable to assimilate the coarse food provided. Both became delirious, and after twelve days Grosh died. With him died the first secret of the Comstock. Bucke, broken in health, returned to Canada. The clue was lost.

Only Old Virginia and Old Pancake, and their drinking, boasting, stupid associates remained on the slopes of Mount Davidson, cursing the heavy blue stuff which clogged their gold rockers, and throwing it away with bitter maledictions. Intelligent practical effort to a definite end had ceased for the time.

Still the little group of men who made up the camp of Johntown must work to live. They had to produce something to pay for the meager rations supplied by the few remaining farmers along the Carson River. And in search for dirt which would yield them enough gold to buy food and the "tarantula juice" whisky which they required, they toiled slowly upward through the canyons. Thus a group which included Henry Comstock, Old Virginia, John Bishop, Aleck Henderson and Jack Yount on a January day of 1859 took samples from the slope on the upper east side of the canyon and washed the dirt in a tiny spring near at hand. Each pan of dirt showed from eight to fifteen cents' worth of gold.

It was nothing to be greatly excited about. But those men were of the type of the true prospector. They drank enough tarantula juice whisky to make the snakes and tarantulas which bit them very sick,

but there was within them an urge for mining discovery even stronger than the whisky. Despite the fact that the new claims which they staked were several miles from their permanent camp at John-town, and as much farther from their source of supplies in the Carson Valley, they started eagerly to work on the new location.

They set up tents and brush huts and named the settlement Gold Hill. Old Virginia took up a spring in the ravine and the miners carried their dirt by hand for washing. For a few weeks they earned little. But they persisted, despite the sneers of the miners at Johnstown in their Saturday night gatherings. Then the product of their rockers began to increase as they delved deeper into the earth. The returns mounted to ten, fifteen and twenty dollars a day.

That was enough for the Johnstownners, who were earning an average of four dollars. Johnstown moved to Gold Hill. The slopes swarmed with prospectors. But the rich ground was limited. When picks and shovels strayed from a definite line the reward fell off sharply. Although they did not suspect it, they were in reality working on a deposit of decomposed outcroppings, nature's concentration of one end of the true Comstock lode. Their discovery was in fact the discovery of the Comstock, though it did not go into the records as such.

There was not enough rich ground to provide profitable claims for the seventy or eighty men who made up the settlement. They scattered, searching

for more. Prospecting interest centered for a time near the head of Six-Mile Canyon. There, in the spring of 1859, Peter O'Riley and Patrick McLaughlin, who had been mining in the district for several years, opened a trench from which they took a wage of one dollar and fifty cents to two dollars a day. It was poor pay. The Irishmen were discouraged. They wanted to get away to a new placer strike on Walker River, of which there was much talk in the camp. But they were broke. They needed one hundred dollars for a grub-stake. So they remained, and toiled and sweat, and instead of one hundred dollars, received forty-three thousand five hundred dollars.

## CHAPTER III

### DISCOVERY OF THE COMSTOCK LODGE

PETER O'RILEY and Patrick McLaughlin were in fact the practical discoverers of the Comstock lode, though the name and fame went to Henry Thomas Paige Comstock. Neither man nor justice has changed greatly in the seven decades since the two Irishmen cleaned their first rocker load of rich ore which topped the mine which was to become world famous as the Ophir.

The spring in which they washed their dirt was claimed by Comstock. By sheer force of a loud voice and some cunning understanding of human nature, he had made himself a figure in the rough community. It happened that upon the day when O'Riley and McLaughlin made their first clean-up, amounting to more than two hundred dollars, Comstock was searching the slopes for a horse which he had turned out to rustle for a living. He had found the horse and was riding back to Gold Hill when he came upon the Irishmen, cleaning their rocker for the day.

One glance was sufficient. "You've struck it, boys!" he shouted, and promptly declared himself in. "The only trouble is that you've struck it on my land. You know I bought this spring from Old Man

Caldwell. And I took up one hundred and sixty acres here for a ranch."

The Irishmen protested, as well they might. It was possible that Comstock had posted a notice claiming the land for agricultural purposes. Men of the time were always posting such notices and never having them recorded or securing title. It was a fact that Comstock, with Manny Penrod and Old Virginia, had bought the water and some old sluice-boxes from a miner named Caldwell in the previous year. But it was also a fact that he had never recorded title to the water rights.

But Comstock nevertheless made his demand and his bluff convincing. His legal rights were negligible, if indeed they existed at all, but his character was such as perhaps might justify the fame which came to him in this doubtful manner with the naming of the Comstock lode. A captious historian might insist that the vast silver deposit was improperly and inadequately named; that the man whose name it has immortalized was in no way worthy of the honor; that his part in the epochal development of the day was insignificant if not disreputable. Such a contention would be true in fact but false in spirit.

Henry Thomas Paige Comstock was a figure so congenial to the time and place that the application of his name to the most spectacular silver deposit in history completes a perfect picture. The very fact that he could bluff the actual discoverers of the first rich mine on the lode into giving him an interest

superior to their own, and that he promptly assumed such importance as to identify the entire lode with his name is indicative of the spirit which launched hundreds of millions of dollars into the world.

Comstock's tall figure and air of sanctimonious dignity impressed the ignorant newcomers who soon began pouring into the district. They accepted him at his own valuation as a man of great affairs. He located dozens of claims and hired Indians and whites to work them while he assumed the airs of a great proprietor. He gained so much naïve satisfaction from the part that frequently he paid out in wages more than the diggings produced. Undoubtedly he was greedy for gold, but even more greedy for the limelight. So he seized naturally and properly upon the position of prominence opened to him with the opening of the lode. And he played the part of leading citizen of such a district to perfection, and at any cost.

Shortly after the opening discovery, a group of women from the little town of Genoa in the Carson Valley visited the scene. Miners in the Ophir were taking fifty dollars to one hundred dollars in gold from a single pan of the crushed ore. A practise had originated in the California placer camps to honor women visitors by washing out a pan of sand for their edification and giving them the resulting gold. Comstock proceeded to do the honors for his visitors.

He advised the man in the cut to fill the gift pans with the richest ore in sight. Each woman thereby

profited to the amount of one hundred and fifty dollars to two hundred dollars, with equal satisfaction to herself and Comstock. But noticing an especially pretty young woman in the group, Old Pancake, always susceptible, secretly dropped a handful of dust from his pocket into the pan set aside for her. His extra gift must have been in the neighborhood of one hundred and fifty dollars, for the pan consigned to beauty netted three hundred dollars. And Comstock was amply repaid by the smile which resulted.

This susceptibility to feminine charms eventually gained him wider notoriety throughout the district. An insignificant Mormon immigrant arrived at the diggings one day with a wife and all his worldly goods in a dilapidated wagon. The wife immediately intrigued Old Pancake's interest. He determined to keep her in camp, and to that end hired her husband to work in the Ophir mine, of which he was acting superintendent. Then he proceeded to win the woman. It seems to have been a simple task. In a week he carried her away to the Carson Valley, and was married by a so-called clergyman who did not recognize the Mormon ritual. Then he introduced the bride in Carson City. The honeymoon was progressing happily when the Mormon husband appeared and protested. Comstock bought him off with a horse, a revolver and sixty dollars in cash, for which he received a regular bill of sale for the woman.

A day or two later he decided to go to San Francisco on business. The trip was difficult for a woman, and

he left the bride in Carson City. At Placerville, on his return, he received word that his wife had eloped with a Carson City youth and was on her way to California. She had to come through Placerville. Comstock lay in wait with a few friends, caught the woman, took her to his room and talked the matter out. She convinced him that she was sorry and would thenceforth be a good and faithful wife. Comstock carried the glad news to the waiting friends and invited them all to meet the repentant bride. But no bride was in the room. She had climbed out a back window and departed again with her more youthful lover.

A reward of one hundred dollars was promptly offered for the capture and return of the runaways. The next day they were driven into Comstock's presence at the point of a revolver. He paid the reward, locked up the wife and turned the young man over to his friends. The youth vanished and the wife was taken back to Virginia City where Comstock managed to keep her until the following spring, when she ran away once more with a strolling miner. That ended Comstock's matrimonial adventure while it widened his fame and revealed unsuspected features in his character.

In the meantime, however, he had sold his entire interest in the Comstock lode to Judge James Walsh for eleven thousand dollars, and set up a store in the metropolis of Carson City, with a branch in Gold Canyon. There he trusted all comers, and after a few



months the Piutes came in and carried away the remains of the stock as a free gift from the proprietor. Thus, within a year of the discovery, Comstock vanished from the lode to which he gave his name.

Although he never reappeared upon the scene, he came once more into the public eye in an effort to justify his place in history. And the effort, if not the facts, does help to justify it. In Butte, Montana, where eventually he ended his own life in poverty, Comstock wrote a letter which was published in the *St. Louis Republican* and republished in numerous western papers. In part, it reads:

"The first discovery of the Comstock lode was made in this way: In the middle of January, 1859, I saw some queer looking stuff in a gopher hole. I ran my hand in and took out a handful of dirt and saw silver and gold in it. At that time big John Bishop and Old Virginia were with me, when I found it; they were sitting upon the side of the hill, Gold Hill, a couple of hundred yards from me. I took up five claims. A couple of weeks from that time, and where the Ophir is now located, I found the same prospects, and told the boys at Gold Hill I was going to work as good a mine as the first discovery. . . . Riley and McLaughlin were working for me at the time of the discovery. I caved the cut in and went after my party to take up the lead and form my company. Manny Penrod, Peter Riley, Patrick McLaughlin, 'Kentuck' or Osborne, and myself formed a company. With my

party I opened the lead and called it the Comstock lode; that is the way they came by their interests; I gave it to them.

"... I also located the Savage claim; showed the ground to old man Savage. I located the Gould and Curry—went into the valley and got old Daddy Curry to come down, and put him in possession of it.

"I also owned the Hale and Norcross, and kept Norcross for a year to work that ground. I also owned the principal part in Gold Hill and leased it out to Walsh and Woodruff. . . . Now I will tell you how I sold it. It has never been told as it ought to be told throughout the United States for my benefit, and it shall be.

"Sandy Bowers, I gave him his claim of 20 feet in Gold Hill. Bill Knight, I gave him his claim; Joe Flato, I gave him his. Joe is dead now and his widow is awful rich. . . .

"I went on working and Judge Walsh and Woodruff were there for two months, trying every day to buy me out. My health being bad I sold the claim to them on these terms: I was to get \$10,000, and did get it at last; and I was to receive one-eleventh of all that ever came out of the claim during my natural life, and at my death was to will it to whoever I pleased; also, to receive \$100 a month.

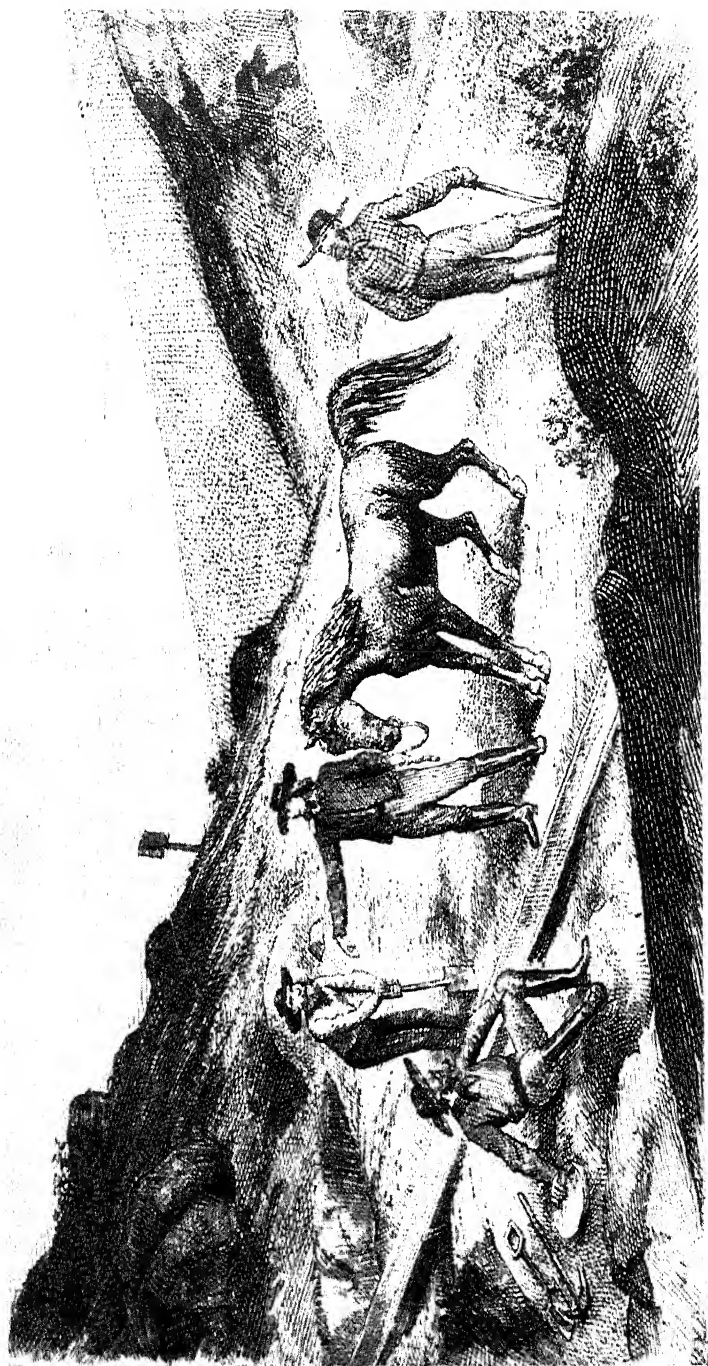
"That was the contract; and two men, Elder Bennett and Manny Penrod witnessed it; but my health was bad and before I had the contract of sale recorded, Woodruff and Walsh sold out. Having taken no lien

on the property, I never got a dollar, from that day to this, except what was at first received. . . .”

So went Comstock's story. The fact that it is largely incorrect is beside the point. The fact that the man could so brazenly claim not only the discovery of the lode but title to virtually all the best ground on it, contrary to unimpeachable evidence, casts a vivid light upon his character and accounts in a large degree for his prominence. Proof of its falsity is contained in the record of sale by Comstock to Judge Walsh for eleven thousand dollars of all his rights and property in the district.

It is clear that Comstock, in common with all his pioneer associates, did not for a moment suspect the vast extent and potential wealth of the district. Few men did. They were gold-miners. They stripped the surface of gold, but could not conceive of a deposit of silver ore which would run into hundreds of millions. In the first rush of Californians to the new district the pioneers who were able to sell claims for as much as five hundred dollars or one thousand dollars openly boasted of having made shrewd deals.

Alvah Gould, for instance, half-owner of the Gould & Curry, a mine destined to produce millions, sold his interest for four hundred and fifty dollars, and went galloping down Gold Canyon shouting, "I've got away with the Californians!" Some years later, when his sale had netted enormous fortunes for the buyers, Gould was keeping a peanut stand in Reno.



DISCOVERY OF THE COMSTOCK LODGE.

Comstock declares himself in on the first rich diggings of O'Riley and McLaughlin in the Ophir Mine.



The Californians whom he "got away with" included one man named George Hearst. In that four-hundred-and-fifty-dollar purchase was part of the foundation of the Hearst fortune, multiplied many times and made famous and powerful through the journalistic energy and originality of its first heir, William Randolph Hearst.

In the beginning, however, records apart from Comstock's subsequent letter reveal that the bulldozing pioneer induced O'Riley and McLaughlin to include his name with those of Penrod and J. A. ("Kentuck") Osborne in the location notice which they had previously posted. The claims covered fifteen hundred feet of ground along what became known to the world as the Comstock lode.

But even with two hundred and fifty dollars' worth of gold in a buckskin poke as the product of a single day's labor, it did not occur to the miners that they had struck a deposit which would startle the world. They were simple, ignorant men. How simple and how ignorant is best revealed by their subsequent actions. While the mine was producing five hundred dollars to one thousand dollars a day from the surface workings, McLaughlin sold his interest for thirty-five hundred dollars. Penrod sold for eighty-five hundred dollars. Osborne sold for seventy-five hundred dollars. Comstock sold for eleven thousand dollars. O'Riley, who held on longer than any of the original locators, received forty thousand dollars, which he promptly lost in stock speculation.

McLaughlin became a cook at forty dollars a month, and died a pauper. O'Riley died in an insane asylum. Comstock, almost starving, committed suicide. Old Virginia was thrown from his horse and killed while on a protracted spree. Their associates, such as Winters, Bishop, Osborne, almost equally prominent in the spectacular discoveries of 1859, died equally poor.

But in the meantime there was such wild activity upon the slopes of Mount Davidson as only a free gold camp can inspire. Claims were located in all directions. A few old prospectors had sufficient experience to trace the richer outcroppings and claim valuable ground. But all were placer miners. They had no knowledge of geology or of quartz formations and possibilities. They scratched and dug at the surface, washing sand and gravel, or breaking the harder ore in crude Mexican arrastras and shoveling it into their rockers.

Always they cursed and threw away the heavy blue-black deposit which clogged the riffles and carried away their quicksilver. No one recognized this black stuff as the rich silver ore which was the true wealth of the Comstock. Still the camp thrived. Tent houses and saloons sprang up in the sage-brush. Men thronged to the workings and labored and sweat.

With the lack of originality common to prospectors they named the camp Pleasant Hill. Some called it Mount Pleasant Point. A miners' meeting, called to arrange some system of registration and transfer for

the claims which were changing hands almost hourly, decided to call it Winnemucca after the chief of the Piute Indians native to the country. Then Old Virginia, happily drunk as he had been for weeks since money and whisky had circulated freely, finished a night's revel by falling at the door of his cabin and breaking his bottle. Rising to his knees, he waved the bottle neck and shouted, "I baptize this ground Virginia Town." The name was promptly and generally accepted, though for years the "town" was generally ignored, and "city" finally was appended.

Within a few weeks the settlement was recognized as the most important place in the Washoe district. Then a California rancher, happening to visit the new workings, in July of 1859, carried away a sample of the blue-black ore which was causing the miners so much grief. In Grass Valley, a leading gold camp on the west slope of the Sierras, he presented the specimen to Judge James Walsh, a leading citizen, who had it assayed. The assay revealed a value of several thousand dollars per ton, mostly in silver.

It was a shock to a gold-minded man, but a shock which he was able to survive. Having been told by the rancher that the Washoe miners were throwing away tons and tons of this blue-black ore, Judge Walsh acted promptly. With a friend, Joe Woodworth, he packed a mule and started before daybreak for Washoe.

He was none too soon. No news in the world spreads with the rapidity of the report of a new strike



in a mining community. No group of men in the world acts as promptly and unanimously upon such information. Only by driving the mule and themselves to the limit of their powers did Walsh and Woodworth reach the Washoe district ahead of half the residents of Grass Valley. Hardly had they purchased an interest in what appeared to be the more promising locations than the rush of Californians was upon them.

Hundreds of men, afoot or on muleback, swarmed across the Sierras, rounded Lake Tahoe, descended into the Carson Valley, and ascended Gold Canyon to Gold Hill and Virginia City. Pioneers of several years' standing who had never known more than a score of neighbors, awoke in their huts to find throngs of strangers wielding pick and shovel and erecting location monuments at their very doors. Wild days were to come.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RUSH TO THE SILVER FIELDS

CASUAL placer mining in Nevada gave way to something far greater upon the day when word reached the Washoe district that the black stuff which the ignorant miners had been throwing away for weeks was in reality silver ore which assayed as high as \$4,791 in silver to the ton. With that word came the vanguard of such a motley army of rich men, poor men, beggar men, thieves, merchants, miners and bar-room chiefs as the world has seldom seen.

Eastward across the Sierras, reasonably safe in summer, came the majority. From all parts of Nevada to which prospectors had penetrated, came others. The rocky sage-brush slopes of Mount Davidson, Gold Canyon, Six-Mile Canyon, Seven-Mile Canyon, Flowery Ridge, and neighboring hills and valleys were dotted with location monuments for miles around. A few of the original settlers and a few of the early arrivals upon the trail of Walsh and Woodruff fixed their claims upon the visible outcroppings of the ledge to which Comstock had arbitrarily given his name—the Comstock lode. These claims included some which were to become as famous as the first mine—the Ophir. They included the Yellow

Jacket, Mexican, Gould & Curry, Hale & Norcross, Chollar, Potosi, Belcher, and more.

But having erected their monuments, most of the swarming invaders could do little more. Even those who were willing and eager to work, did not know how to work a silver mine. They had had their training in the gold placers of California. They could wield a pick, open a surface deposit, shovel sand and gravel into a rocker, and wash it for gold. This was not the way to recover the silver which predominated in the new diggings. The newcomers for the most part occupied themselves in trading "feet" in their holdings, carousing in the saloons which sprang up overnight on the mountainside, or prospecting for further discoveries.

In order to trade, however, it was necessary to have some semblance of recorded title. There had been virtually no government in the district since Brigham Young had withdrawn his Mormon settlers and his paternalistic control. Gold Hill, the leading camp prior to the O'Riley and McLaughlin discovery, had assumed to rule the region under a constitution drawn up by the leading miners. That document, still preserved, is worthy of quotation in part:

"Whereas the isolated position we occupy far from all legal tribunals and cut off from those fountains of justice which every American citizen should enjoy . . . renders it necessary that we organize in body

politic for our mutual protection against the lawless and for meeting out justice between man and man; therefore, we, citizens of Gold Hill, do hereby agree to adopt the following rules and laws for our government. . . .

### Rules and Regulations.

"Sec. 1.—Any person who shall wilfully and with malice aforethought take the life of any person, shall, upon being duly convicted thereof, suffer the penalty of death by hanging.

"Sec. 2.—Any person who shall wilfully wound another shall, upon conviction thereof, suffer such penalty as the jury shall determine.

"Sec. 3.—Any person found guilty of robbery or theft, shall, upon conviction, be punished with stripes or banishment, as the jury may determine.

"Sec. 4.—Any person found guilty of assault and battery, or exhibiting deadly weapons, shall, upon conviction, be fined or banished as the jury may determine."

There were more laws, equally crude, but the good faith in which they were drawn is revealed in the dramatic manner in which occasionally they were enforced. William Wright, a contemporary of Mark Twain on Virginia City's leading newspaper, *The Territorial Enterprise*, in his *History of the Big Bonanza*, published in 1876, has left a detailed account of one such incident.

"In August, 1859, two thieves who gave the names of George Ruspas and David Reise stole a yoke of cattle at Chinatown (now Dayton), and driving them to Washoe valley, offered them for sale at a price so low that they were at once suspected of having stolen the animals. They were arrested, and it having been proved that the cattle had been stolen from the ranch of a Mr. Campbell, near Dayton, the sentence of the jury was that they have their left ears cut off, and that they be banished the country.

". . . Jim Sturtevant, an old resident of Washoe valley, was appointed executioner. He drew out a big knife, ran his thumb along the blade, and not finding its edge just to his mind, gave it a few rakes across a rock. He then walked up to Reise and taking a firm hold on the upper part of the organ designated by the jury, shaved it off, close up, at a single slash.

"As he approached Ruspas, the face of that gentleman was observed to wear a cunning smile. He seemed very much amused about something. The executioner, however, meant business, and tossing Reise's ear over to the jury . . . he went after Ruspas. . . . Sturtevant pulled aside the fellow's hair, which he wore hanging down upon his shoulders, and lo! there was no left ear; it having been parted with on some previous similar occasion.

"Here was a fix for the executioner! His instructions were to cut off the fellow's left ear, and there was no left ear on which to operate. The prisoner now looked him in the face and laughed aloud. . . .

Sturtevant now appealed to the jury for instructions. The jury were enjoying the scene not a little, but being in a good humor said they would reconsider their sentence; that rather than anyone should be disappointed the executioner might take off the prisoner's right ear if he had one.

"The smile faded out of the countenance of Ruspas as he felt Sturtevant's fingers securing a firm hold on the top of his right ear. An instant after, Sturtevant gave a vigorous slash, and then tossed Ruspas' ear over to the jury, saying as he did so that they now had a pair of ears that were 'rights and lefts' and therefore properly mated."

Under men capable of such enforcement of their own crude laws, the system of recording title to the mining claims which were almost their only property was strangely ineffective. The miners of Gold Hill first elected V. A. Houseworth, a blacksmith considered as honest as Longfellow's, to be Recorder. Evidently Houseworth considered others as honest as himself. He thought to complete his duties by placing a blank book on a shelf behind the bar of a saloon.

There the miners were allowed to enter the records of their locations as they saw fit. Further, they could erase and alter either their own records or those of their associates whenever and however they wished. The book, still preserved, shows ample evidence of many such erasures and alterations. Even unaltered records were so indefinite as to be almost valueless.

O'Riley and McLaughlin, discoverers of the Ophir claims which launched the Comstock, signed one recorded notice which reads: "We the undersigned claim this spring and stream for mining purposes." Another record appears: "We the undersigned claim 2,000 feet on this quarts lead, ledge, lode or vein, beginning at this stake and running north." There are scores of such records which fail even to identify the claims as being in Nevada, let alone any definite part of Nevada. They are amusingly remindful of the historic notice of Doc Trotter, locating the famous lost Breyfogle mine:

"Commencing at this big monument of stone on a cold rainy night and running 35 hours with Indians after him come to a big canyon that runs up to the North with two big rocks on side of the mouth of the canyon the one on the right round and smooth, the one on the left rough and rugged. These rocks stand 20 feet high. Follow up this canyon about five hours on burros or one and one-half hours on horseback you will come to the forks of the canyon. Take the left hand one and ride hard for about two hours and you will come to an old stone corral. Go to the right of this about 9,000 feet and you will come to a small gulch leading up to the right. Go up this about a quarter of a mile you will come to a small water hole; sometimes it is dry. Water your animals here, fill your canteen and then go until the gulch forks again, then take the right hand one until it

forks, then lead up the left one just a little ways you will discover the find we have been unable to locate. The canyon is yet and we take this means of locating the big find."

On such an unstable foundation lawsuits blossomed almost as profusely as the sales and trades of mining property. Such suits started as soon as the vast potential value of the Comstock lode was appreciated. Among the first was one against the Ophir Company, promoters of the first paying mine in the district. Comstock and his associates having sold control of the Ophir to Judge Walsh and Joe Woodworth, another company purchased neighboring ground which had been located by Old Virginia in the previous year. As soon as the Ophir workings revealed the real riches of the lode the neighboring company sued the Ophir on the theory that the Ophir was really a part of their vein. The basis of the suit, as in later similar suits, was the vague description in the location records.

In this case it became necessary to produce the original notice deposited at the scene of location by Old Virginia. But the parties bringing the suit could never get the old reprobate sufficiently sober to find the notice. Finally they grew desperate and locked the old man up in a mining tunnel all night. In the morning they found him sober but savage. He refused to do anything for them until they had given him half a tumblerful of whisky. Then he marched up the hill, pulled a stone from among the outcrop-



pings, and produced the notice which had been buried there. The plaintiffs netted sixty thousand dollars from that notice. Old Virginia's profits were an old horse, a pair of blankets and a bottle of whisky.

With the basic business of the camp on such precarious footing, the more intelligent men who had come in with the first great rush to invest, to mine, or to build and operate mills for the reduction of the ore, quickly reorganized the system of recording titles. An official Mining Recorder was elected to keep the records straight. The first days of wild speculation passed into comparative calm. There was work for some of the men who wanted to work, but no more fortunes to be picked casually out of the ground. The price of food was almost prohibitive, and many of the newcomers were driven back to California to escape starvation. But even those disappointed ones helped to spread the news that the silver wealth of the world appeared to be concentrated in the Washoe district.

By the time the extent and nature of the Comstock lode had been so advertised, late in the autumn of 1859, snow was falling in the Sierras. The single narrow, rocky, precipitous emigrant wagon road from Carson Valley to Placerville was virtually impassable by the time the certainty of unlimited riches had penetrated to San Francisco. But when it did penetrate, the adventurous spirits who made up the majority of the state's population were rarin' to go.

Even the heat of enthusiasm generated by stories

of millions to be gained could not thaw the drifts and avalanches which blocked the mountains in that deadly winter. Most of the invaders were checked at Placerville. A few struggled on to snow-bound stations higher in the mountains. Perhaps a few dozen reached Virginia City. Perhaps a dozen, starved and frozen out of the brush huts and dugouts which were the chief habitations on the snow-swept slopes of Mount Davidson, reached the Sacramento Valley, with frozen hands or feet and cases of pneumonia to warn the waiting throngs of the terrors of the mountain passes.

It was a bitter winter. There were fifty feet of snow in the Sierra passes. The Washoe Mountains were stripped of their scrub pines to provide firewood for the miners. The two water-power arrastras which had been built by Woodworth and Hastings on the Carson River to reduce three tons of the silver ore per day were frozen frequently. The four-stamp horse-powered mill constructed by Logan and Holmes, the first stamp mill in the district, did little better.

Still, bars of bullion, the first silver ever produced in Nevada, appeared in the windows of San Francisco banks and added a white flame to the fires of excitement.

The actual development of the Comstock was negligible. Work was almost at a standstill. There was, however, some opportunity for the organization of local government, the saner study of the district's

possibilities, and the formation of more intelligent plans of mining. So when the first breaking of winter in the Sierras allowed the movement of the hardiest of the waiting throngs, the newcomers found a self-conscious if not yet a self-respecting community.

Those few starved and frozen residents of Virginia City who had reached California during the winter carried the news that flour was selling at seventy-five cents a pound, and all food at similar prices. Blankets were almost beyond price, and a tent was worth the price of a modern bungalow. Moved by such opportunities for profit, daring traders packed mules with food, whisky and blankets, and invaded the Sierra passes before the end of February. The mules sank to their bellies in the drifts. The blankets were unloaded and spread upon the snow to give a safer footing. Still the attempt failed.

Not until March did a trader reach Virginia City with his pack-train. There he erected a tent, sold two hundred dollars' worth of drinks before night-fall, and rented blankets and space to roll them on the floor to forty men at one dollar each. Close upon his heels came others, until the frozen passes of the high mountains swarmed with men and mules.

The river steamers from San Francisco to Sacramento, whence the land trip began by way of Placerville, were loaded to the sinking point with freight and men bound for Washoe. Only one who has witnessed the unparalleled excitement of a new mining camp in a land whose prosperity is built upon

mines can imagine the situation. Farmers abandoned their fields, merchants their stores, mechanics their tools, teachers their schools, to take part in the invasion of the land of promise.

Tons upon tons of miscellaneous freight littered the roadside above Placerville, with the owners vainly offering fifty cents a pound for its transportation to Virginia City. Every possible form of conveyance was impressed. Carts, wagons, pack animals, even wheelbarrows labored up the rutted muddy road from Placerville to the first stage station at Sportsmen's Hall, eleven miles away. There, weaklings began to drop out, while others struggled on to Junction Hill, the highest point west of the main ridge of the Sierras.

By that point the line was definitely thinning. Mules mired in the mudholes, wagons sunk to their hubs, abandoned packs in the roadway helped to impede the traffic. But the hardier spirits trudged onward and upward, and the wealthier travelers rolled slowly past them in the swaying stages of the Pioneer Company, or joined their ranks and plodded through the muddy snow on steeper slopes where the stage horses could not pull their load.

The travelers were never out of sight of other travelers, and never out of sight of the tragic evidence of disaster which had overtaken other adventurers. Ruins of abandoned freight wagons, carcasses of mules, broken wheelbarrows, picks, shovels, looted packs littered the way. Now and again through the rain and fog and snow there loomed a wayside tavern

built of wagon bottoms, packing cases and burlap, to welcome the wayfarers with whisky, and table d'hôtes consisting of beans, bacon and potatoes. More pretentious places such as "Pete's," "Dirty Mike's," the "Strawberry Hotel," or "Woodford's" offered a night's shelter in addition to the whisky and food.

Strawberry Hotel, in what is still known as Strawberry Flat, high in the Sierras, was the most pretentious of the stopping-places. It was a large log house with a main room containing an immense fireplace. Huge logs blazed on the hearth, throwing out a heat which must have been welcome to the half-frozen travelers, though it drove them to the benches ranged around the walls. When the dining-room opened the crowd rushed the doors and filled the benches around the rough board tables. A tin plate heaped with beans, potatoes and bread was thrust before each. A tin cup filled with scalding black coffee, sweetened with molasses, supplemented the fare. Each hungry wayfarer wiped up his plate with the last scrap of his bread and it was ready for the next customer.

Then the diners were herded out like cattle into the main room, and the rush was repeated. Eight or ten times at each meal this occurred, and by the time the last of the travelers was fed, three hundred men lay rolled in their blankets on the floor of the main room, packed together like logs in a raft. The overflow, numbering forty or more on many nights, were packed similarly upon the floor of another room less than twenty feet square.

Long before daylight the weary men struggled into their boots and renewed the evening's invasion of the dining-room. Then they hoisted their packs and went out into the crackling air of the snow-bound mountains. No vehicles of any kind were attempting to make the grade over the crest of the range at this season. The stage company provided saddle mules for its passengers. A few men had their own animals. The majority faced the icy peaks on foot. A bitter night had frozen the snow, beaten to a muddy slush by the travelers of the previous day. The footing was solid, if slippery. Save when a mule slipped and broke a leg in an ice-lined hole, or a man slid and rolled down the grade, progress was comparatively rapid.

By noon the crest of the mountains might be reached. But by noon on comparatively mild days the surface had thawed and been churned to slush in which animals mired hopelessly and men sank to their hips when they could not advance by leaping from rock to rock. On the stormy days which predominated at the time of this early invasion the traveler was blinded by snow, driven by terrific winds. But beyond the crest there was no way to go but down. And down they went, slipping, sliding, stumbling and rolling for some four or five miles to the Lake Valley House, in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

It was a bitter test of men and animals. No weakling survived. Avalanches alternated with blizzards to blot out the trail, which was little better than a

goat path at best. Stretches of sticky clay where the mountain had been swept bare by wind or slides alternated with ice-coated rocks to trap and trip the feet of the wayfarer. Men who passed safely through the ordeal were men who might fit naturally into the maelstrom of excitement and labor and hardship and ruthless accomplishment, good or bad, which was Virginia City in that spring of 1860.

Four days by stage and muleback, or six days on foot, were consumed in the journeys undertaken in March and April of that year between Placerville and Virginia City. By May, when the last of the season's storms were diminishing in the Sierras, some thousands of these passionate pilgrims, stark mad for silver, were crowded in and around the huddle of huts, tents, shacks and dugouts which marked the town. And still they came.

Some, broken by poor food and exposure, returned to Sacramento on foot. These met a perfect torrent of adventurers, still pouring over the mountains from Placerville to the Carson Valley. The disillusioned ones reasoned and expostulated with the newcomers, explaining that not one man out of fifty in the camp had either a job or a mine. The newcomers laughed and pushed ahead. Of such stuff were the pioneers of Virginia City.

It was an epochal period in the history of the West, second only to that which followed the discovery of gold in California a decade earlier. In many features it was more spectacular than the California gold-rush.

While the rush to California had brought adventurers across the continent, around the Horn, or across the Isthmus, to scatter them through half the state, the great rush to the silver fields of Nevada concentrated a similar migration within a few weeks upon a single trail into a limited area. It also marked the settlement of a state, just as the rush to California had done. And to add to its color in the history of pioneering America, an Indian war speedily developed.

The Pony Express had been instituted late that winter. One newspaper account of an early trip to Washoe mentions a meeting with the first rider of that historic service. "On the very summit we met a lonely rider dashing along at a tremendous rate. We wondered what could possibly induce him to go on through that gale, and thought it must be some very important business. It was the Pony Express."

Hardly had this service been instituted when an express rider reported to Virginia City that Piute Indians had murdered two or three men and burned the buildings at Williams' Station on the Carson River. Excitement mounted high. Major Ormsby of Carson City organized a band of one hundred and five volunteers to quell what was believed to be a general uprising of the Indians. Finding only blackened ruins at Williams' Station, the volunteers marched on toward Pyramid Lake, the headquarters of the Piutes in western Nevada. Most of the volunteers were untrained adventurers, seeking entertainment. They found it in a canyon a few miles below the lake.



There they discovered their first Indians and opened fire. The Indians returned the volley and fell back up the slopes of the narrow canyon. The volunteers pursued. Suddenly they were confronted by two or three hundred Indians who arose from behind rocks and poured a deadly fire into the mounted and unprotected whites. Horses and men fell dead by scores. The survivors turned to flee. But a second band of Indians cut off retreat through the canyon. The whites took cover in a clump of trees. A deadly battle followed. Only twenty-five men of the one hundred and five who had enlisted so eagerly in the brief campaign survived to reach Virginia City. It was a massacre and a rout.

When the survivors, wounded and exhausted, straggled into the mining town they attempted to justify their defeat by explaining that the Piutes mustered five hundred armed men, that they were equipped with the best of guns and ammunition, and that they had thousands in reserve for the task of sweeping the white invaders from their ancestral hills and plains. A call for help was sent immediately to California. Volunteer companies were formed in Sacramento, Nevada City and Downieville, and brought across the mountains to save the settlers and the mines.

A rude stockade was built in Virginia City for the shelter of women and children. The foundation walls of a new stone building were used for a similar purpose. The miners reverted to the methods of their

forefathers and melted up every bit of lead in the community for bullets. What was in effect martial law was declared: "Resolved, that during the next sixty days, or until the settlement of the present Indian difficulties, no claim or mining ground within the Territory shall be subject to re-location, or liable to be jumped for non-work."

All business was virtually suspended. The faint-hearted fled precipitately to California. The strong-hearted erected forts and prepared to defend their property with their lives. After nearly two weeks of such excitement the second expedition against the Indians marched out of Virginia City. It included two hundred and seven regular soldiers and five hundred and forty-nine volunteers, all well equipped. They came upon the Piutes in the same canyon where the first battle had occurred. In the engagement which followed the whites killed one hundred and sixty Indians and wounded scores, while they themselves lost but two. One of these was Captain E. F. Storey, for whom Storey County, Nevada, later was named.

The war was over, as abruptly as it had begun. Like many Indian wars in the settlement of America, it reflected more color than credit upon the civilization of the whites involved. Subsequent investigation revealed that the murders at Williams' Station had not been committed by Piutes at all, but by men of the smaller Bannock tribe. In the absence of Williams, proprietor of the station, his men had seized,

mistreated, and locked up two young Piute squaw who were married to Bannocks and lived at Walke Lake.

One of the Bannocks, searching for his squaw found her imprisoned in a cave near the station. When he demanded her release, the station tender drove him away with abuse. He reported to the Piute chief at Walker Lake and demanded redress. It was refused. The Piutes wanted no trouble with the whites. They were not a warlike tribe. The Bannock went to old Winnemucca, chief of the Piute at Pyramid Lake. The old man refused to interfere. The young buck then went to young Winnemucca, war-chief of the tribe, and for the third time met refusal, being told to report to the white authorities at Carson City if he wanted redress.

Furious then he went to his own tribal chief and was given thirty men who descended upon Williams Station, murdered the men who had abused the squaws, and burned the buildings. With their blood lust aroused, the Bannock warriors murdered several prospectors in cold blood on their way homeward.

Old Winnemucca, suing in person for peace after the second battle of Pyramid Lake, disclaimed any responsibility for these murders. He insisted that his son, in charge of the warriors who met and defeated the first attacking party under Major Ormsby, had tried to avoid battle. They had hoisted a white flag to gain time for negotiations before the first shot was fired. But the whites had ignored the flag and shot at

Indian. The Indians had then fought in self-defense. Many records of the old man's peaceful character and desire to live in amity with the whites tend to support that statement.

In any event, however disgraceful, the first and last Indian war in Nevada was ended, and the primary business of the Comstock lode quickly forced all such memories into the background.

Summer was upon the slopes of Mount Davidson. A population of thousands swarmed upon the hills where a few hundred had toiled in the previous summer. The trails up Gold Canyon from the Carson Valley, and over the narrow ridge from Gold Hill to Virginia City had been broadened to a road which could accommodate freight wagons and stages. A laborer could get bed and board for four dollars a day, and earn a wage of five if he were willing to work hard in the shafts, tunnels and drifts which were sinking into the lode from the open diggings at first used.

The district was settling and solidifying on a foundation of silver. Among the miscellaneous assortment of adventurers, gamblers, prospectors, merchants, miners and laborers, were men of ability and energy sufficient to assure the success of any community. Unnoted in the motley throng were the men who were to become kings of the Comstock in three successive dynasties.

The first to attain prominence, though never the glory of a king of the Comstock, was William M.

Stewart, one of the few great men of the region who were American born. None, unless it might have been Stewart, stood out among the flaring lights and flamboyant characters which marked the Virginia City of that first year of fame and progress. Later he was aptly described by the *Gold Hill News* as "towering above his fellow citizens like the Colossus of Rhodes, and having as much brass in his constitution as that famous statue."

Stewart indeed was a giant physically, and far above the average run of mining camp lawyers mentally. But in the excitement and turmoil of those early days even Stewart was undistinguished. The days of his power in the Comstock and the years when he was to become the most picturesque figure in the United States Senate were still unsuspected.

## CHAPTER V

### A CITY IS BUILT ON SILVER

"THE wondrous city of Virginia," which welcomed the half-frozen, half-starved multitude pouring across the Sierras in the early months of 1860 was graphically described by a visitor of the day.

"Frame shanties pitched together as if by accident; tents of canvas, of blankets, of brush, of potato sacks and old shirts, with empty whisky barrels for chimneys; smoking hovels of mud and stone; coyote holes in the hillsides forcibly seized by men; pits and shanties with smoke issuing from every crevice; piles of goods and rubbish on craggy points, in the hollows, on the rocks, in the mud, on the snow—everywhere—scattered broadcast in pell-mell confusion, as if the clouds had suddenly burst overhead and rained down the dregs of all the flimsy, rickety, filthy little hovels and rubbish of merchandise that had ever undergone the process of evaporation from the earth since the days of Noah.

"The intervals of space, which may or may not have been streets, were dotted over with human beings of such sort, variety and numbers that the famous ant hills of Africa were as nothing in compar-

ison. To say that they were rough, muddy, unkempt and unwashed would be but faintly expressive of their actual appearance. They seemed to have caught the diabolical tint and grime of the whole place."

There were in fact no streets in the Virginia City of those early hectic days. Three ill-defined lanes straggled through the jungle of tents and huts scattered over the lower slopes of Mount Davidson. Neither the district nor the townsite had ever seen a surveyor. Wherever a pack train could most conveniently make a trail around the mountain after topping the divide which separated Gold Hill from Virginia City, there, by courtesy, was a street. Even courtesy did not always figure. A weary traveler might dump his pack and erect his tent on any comparatively level spot. If this happened to be in the way of a following traveler with a more extensive outfit, the second man could take his choice of circling the obstruction or removing it. Frequently he removed it, and dumped the household goods unceremoniously aside. So were formed what served as streets.

As the spring advanced and traffic increased, these streets were widened and straightened automatically, and at last differentiated as A, B and C Streets. Even then they were neither graded nor paved, and the connecting thoroughfares continued for a long time to be simply precipitous trails. Indeed, they are more or less that to-day. But Virginia City had

money, and even more stimulating, promise. The ten thousand newcomers of that first hectic year demanded food, drink, clothing, blankets and shelter.

Moore, the trader who brought the first commercial consignment of whisky, blankets and tin plates, and erected a tent which served as saloon and dormitory in March, was followed quickly by others. One Lyman Jones maintained a canvas "hotel," eighteen by forty feet in size, with a bar and fixtures consisting of an old sluice-box, a dozen tin cups, a pitcher and a barrel of very hard liquor. The side of a wagon box, carried from the Carson Valley on muleback, formed another bar. Into such places the grimy miners crowded for entertainment and shelter. The climate was bitter. Furious gales swept down from the ice-clad Sierras and whirled around Mount Davidson. There is a sidelight upon the buoyant temperament which marked the men of the camp in that even while picking up the ruins of their huts demolished by these storms, they came to call the winds the "Washoe zephyrs."

But with their quickly growing prosperity the pioneers demanded such comforts and luxuries as always have been the first evidence of success in a mining town—expensive food, drink and raiment. It did not matter that during the previous winter they had seen hundreds of cattle starve and freeze to death in the valley below. It did not matter that some of the miners themselves had frozen and starved. The fact that they had considered themselves fortunate to be



able to buy flour at seventy-five cents and sugar at fifty cents a pound was forgotten. Now they wanted oysters and caviar and champagne. Coming out of the muddy tunnels and shafts which were now extending one hundred feet into the lode, they wanted broadcloth and linen and fine boots to display their prosperity and prove their triumph over stubborn nature and hardship. They wanted mahogany bars at which to drink their liquor, and fine glass for its service. And what they wanted, they got.

The demand for adequate transportation was tremendous. The Pioneer Stage Company, Swan & Company, and numerous lesser organizations hurried to satisfy it. The old Emigrant Road which led from Carson City through the Sierras to Placerville had almost reverted to nature after the first few years of the gold-rush to California. Storms and avalanches had buried it or broken it away to a dangerous rocky trail at many points. It was almost impassable to teams and wagons, even when the passes were bare of snow in summer. In winter it was chaotic. After the difficult, costly and occasionally tragic passages of the spring of 1860, the leading stage companies and freighters found it profitable to mend the worst stretches of the road. Such expenditures were repaid by the quicker and safer transportation of passengers and freight, and the saving on animals and vehicles.

The transportation lines quickly proved more profitable than many of the mines. Before the summer was over the Carson-Placerville route had been



*Courtesy California State Library.*

A PIONEER ARTIST'S PICTURE OF THE FIRST RUSH TO THE COMSTOCK IN 1859.

Pony express, stage-coach, and emigrant train in background.



improved sufficiently to accommodate four-horse teams with safety. A second road through Sierra City, Downieville and Nevada City was open to heavy traffic. The trail up Gold Canyon had been improved to a fair road. Freight wagons groaned over the narrow ridge from Gold Hill to Virginia City. Lumber dropped from four hundred dollars to eighty dollars a thousand feet. Carpenters and masons, attracted by what was considered the enormous wage of eight dollars a day, flocked to the scene. The building of a city began in earnest.

Peter O'Riley completed the stone building whose foundation had served as a stockade for the protection of women and children in the panic of the Indian uprising. The Sandy Bowers mentioned by Comstock as recipient of one of his rich gift claims, was erecting an imposing edifice in the Washoe Valley. It was a residence which he designed to make worthy of his riches, with solid silver door-knobs, mahogany paneling, goldfish ponds and similar evidences of taste and luxury. A hundred other buildings were going up rapidly in place of the original shacks and tents. When winter again drove the men of the district from their blanket rolls under the stars there were many substantial roofs for shelter.

The city boasted two quartz mills, eight hotels and boarding-houses, nine restaurants, ten livery stables, twenty-five saloons, thirty-eight stores, and offices, warehouses, blacksmith shops and private residences in proportion.

The mines were flourishing. Thirty-seven companies had been incorporated before the close of the year, with a total capital stock of thirty million dollars, and that in a district which had yielded a total of two hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars in the previous year. The Ophir, first of the great mines on the lode, had sunk a slanting shaft nearly two hundred feet, and had found the ore body widening steadily to thirty, forty and fifty feet—something unprecedented in mining history.

The one-horse windlass or whim which had supplanted hand power to draw up buckets of ore, was replaced by a fifteen-horsepower steam engine, the finest piece of machinery in the Comstock. But even in that early day and at that comparatively slight depth the mines were encountering the seepage of water which was to prove their greatest source of tribulation, and the cause of their most spectacular struggle through twenty years to come. The water frequently drove the miners from their work, helped to cave in the walls of the shafts and ore chambers, and otherwise demoralized operations. Before the summer was over a forty-five-horsepower engine supplanted the first, and devoted its energy to pumping out water when it was not hoisting ore or miners.

The situation was typical. No story of the big bonanza would be complete without sufficient digression to explain the tremendous mechanical difficulties encountered and overcome in all the mines of the district. Such difficulties were especially trying

in that first year of ore production, for the simple reason that they presented problems never before encountered by the workers involved. As any history worth recording depends upon the character of the men who make it, so the character of those early Comstockers must be revealed in the light of their accomplishments. Only by making clear the difficulties over which they triumphed can the magnitude of their triumph be understood.

The ore body in the Ophir, and to a slightly lesser extent in the adjacent mines, was soft and crumbling. The ore chambers or stopes whence the ore was removed to the surface were immense. The larger these emptying chambers became, the more difficult was the problem of bracing up the walls and roof. The timbering which was done was based upon the miners' experience in the narrow veins and small stopes of the California quartz mines. It consisted of posts and lintels—logs set up with other logs across their tops to hold the roofs. Such arrangement quickly proved its inadequacy in the huge stopes of the Comstock. Caves were frequent. Lives were crushed out in one and another of the mines. The men could not pick down the rich ore behind the lintels. The looseness of the ore and the surrounding "country rock," with the weight of the mountain overhead resulted in slacking and swelling of the ground which twisted and splintered great logs like matchwood. Some of the mines stopped work. Others reduced their output. Still the ore bodies widened as they became

richer with depth. No miner could stand by and see all that wealth barred from him by such a condition.

One inquiring director of the Ophir discovered in San Francisco a German miner named Philip Deidesheimer.

"What would you do if you had a quartz lode fifty or sixty feet wide?" the director demanded.

Deidesheimer doubted that there was such a deposit in the world.

"Go to Virginia City and see it," said the director. "And then figure out how we can mine it."

Deidesheimer went, saw and conquered. After a few weeks of experiment he evolved a method of timbering never before used. So effective and practical did it prove that it is still in use throughout the world, seventy years later. It was a simple system, designated as "square sets," formed of short timbers which could be built up in a system of interlocking cribs, similar in appearance to a child's mechanical building toys of to-day. These cribs could be constructed one upon another to any needed width or height, and roofed or floored with planks upon which the miners worked to dislodge the ore above.

Mining engineers came from all parts of the world to Virginia City to examine the system and adopt it for their own use. Deidesheimer made no attempt to patent it, and indeed explained it and helped to install it in the other great ore chambers of the Comstock. The first serious problem had been solved. So progress continued.

The problem of reducing the rich ore to bullion was contemporaneous. But this was a task for which chemists and metallurgists had been preparing for generations. The simple mule-power arrastras of the Mexican silver-miners were quickly supplemented by stamp mills. Almarin B. Paul, an able quartz mill superintendent of Nevada City, organized the Washoe Gold and Silver Mining Company and signed contracts in June for the reduction of ore in August. Only then did he order necessary machinery built in San Francisco, and lumber from the forests of the Sierras. And in August, true to his word, the twenty-four stamps of the Pioneer mill began to crush ore. On the same day a nine-stamp mill built by Coover and Harris began operations. Before the year passed, Paul's company was constructing a sixty-four-stamp mill. Smaller mills, patios and arrastras lined the canyons and stretched along the Carson River.

Inconspicuous among them was a little plant owned by Adolph Sutro, in Dayton. Sutro was a keen-eyed, strongly built man of thirty, of German-Jewish parentage, and an immigrant like so many of the men who were to make the Comstock famous and to be made famous by it. He had come to New York in 1850, and across the Isthmus to San Francisco, lured by the gold-rush. There he had met with indifferent success, but had remained optimistic and energetic in his search for an opportunity to make his fortune in some mining venture as he saw so many young men doing. This opportunity he appeared to have found



after ten years, in a reclamation plant which proved so successful in the early days of the Comstock that indirectly it launched its owner upon a scheme which was to shake the lode literally to its foundations, leave Sutro's mark upon it forever, and put him in the way of leaving his mark upon history.

All such activities inspired others, until the district fairly seethed with life. The demand for timbers in the deepening mines stimulated a lumber trade which made vast fortunes, and almost denuded the eastern slopes of the Sierras. The movement of these timbers to the mines constituted a huge business. The better working of the mines and mills produced millions of dollars to finance greater expansion, and to build a greater community. The resulting excitement among the thousands already interested in mines in California prompted speculation in Virginia City and San Francisco alike.

Residents of the Comstock were literally in a frenzy in that summer as ore which assayed from fifty dollars to two thousand dollars a ton poured from the Ophir, the Mexican, the Savage, the Gould & Curry, and other mines on the lode. It was easy for men of the adventurous type which filled the district to imagine that there must be hundreds of deposits equally rich throughout those desert mountains. Why should the silver be limited to one narrow vein? The desert was all alike. One had but to look upon its monotony to be assured of that.

So they went out, staked and recorded a thousand

claims, and rushed back to the hectic town with samples to show and "feet" to sell to the daily newcomers, who knew no more about mines than they. "Bargains" were offered in the Lady Bryant, the Woolly Horse, the Mammoth, the Bobtailed Nag, the Root Hog or Die, the Grizzly Hill, at prices ranging from ten to seventy-five dollars a foot. A thousand more claims were recorded, and a thousand more, and interests in them offered on the local market.

In the excitement of the moment many such offerings were snapped up, and their buyers trekked back to San Francisco, assured that their fortunes were made. So complete was the self-hypnosis that many of the mad promoters promptly turned and invested the profits of their frauds in the frauds of their associates. For twenty-four hours of each day the saloons resounded with the clamor of frenzied men. The overflow crowds in the streets conducted an impromptu curb exchange which Broad Street in its palmiest days could not surpass in excitement.

Life could hardly continue at such heat. Reaction became apparent in San Francisco even before the first fever abated on the Comstock itself. The shipping clerks and merchants and professional men who had been lured by excitement to put their money into the wildcats, found that they had bought shares in barren rock. The promoters tried to keep up interest and income by levying assessments to develop the worthless hills. Valuations crashed.

The few conservative miners and business men of

Virginia City bitterly resented the mad speculation and consequent reaction against the prosperity of their city. One resident wrote at length to the *San Francisco Bulletin*, a letter which reveals the situation with singular clarity:

"We are informed that there is a panic in San Francisco in relation to our mining stocks; that nothing will sell; that even Ophir, Washoe, Chollar and Corsair are drugs on the market; that banks will not discount Washoe speculators' paper; that the bottom has fallen out, confidence gone and that there is a general collapse.

"Two months ago these wise men of Gotham who are now decrying the mineral resources of Washoe went to sea in a bowl and got badly wet. Two months ago everything would sell. People bought blindly. . . . The price and number of feet were the only matters of interest to the buyer; fools at your end of the telegraph were deceived by knaves at our end; and we sent you mysterious hints of new discoveries that never existed, accounts of sales which never took place.

"Your prudent men who would not buy a foot of land in San Francisco or make a loan without a careful search of title, have risked thousands without a thought. Your greedy folly was taken advantage of by our avarice, and you became the victims of your own sublime stupidity and dishonesty. A change comes and a panic. There are prudent men in San

Francisco and honest men in Washoe, and when this class of men had time to exchange opinions and stem the current of senseless and blind speculation it was found that many of the transactions in silver mines were but sales and exchanges in stone heaps. The result was, naturally enough, a reaction. Wildcat claims became valueless and good claims staggered under the blow."

Even the steady producers slumped in price, and the wise miners working in their depths bought up the scattered interests at a hundredth part of their value. There was no question in the minds of the more intelligent men on the lode that here were fortunes. Ore assaying less than fifty dollars a ton was being thrown away because the crude milling methods of the time could not take sufficient profit from it. Ore worth more than fifty dollars was being produced in such quantities and refined with such profit that hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash were coming in to finance expansion, improvement, and the building of a city.

The reaction was a benefit to the Comstock though it broke the hearts as it broke the bank accounts of innumerable first "investors" whose greed was equaled only by their ignorance. It cleared the air as it cleared the area of useless citizens. Most of those left in the district when the snows of that winter again isolated the Comstock were workers.

The year had marked some great accomplishments.

A town stood in the place of a huddle of huts. Mines were opened far into the mountain where they could be worked through the bitterest winter days. Mills were operating to turn the ore into bullion. Men of ability were in charge of development in the place of such feeble citizens as Old Virginia and Old Pancake. Adequate roads were ready to assure supplies for further improvement. Capital and brains, undisturbed by the losses and disappointments of the foolhardy, were ready to go on with the work. A great future was assured, but not without further and greater tribulation.

In December a howling blizzard swept down from the Sierras upon the Washoe district. It was the worst storm within the memory of the oldest inhabitants of mountains and desert. When it had passed, snow stood six feet deep in Virginia City and Gold Hill, where such old-timers as Comstock had never seen more than a foot of snow. Gold Canyon and the other canyons sloping from Mount Davidson to the Carson River were impassable. The drifts were banked high around every quartz mill and shaft house.

Then a warm rain set in. The flood was terrific. Half the buildings in Gold Canyon were swept away. New mills and hoisting works were destroyed. Every mining shaft in the line of the flood was filled to the surface. Stores of hay, grain and ore were carried down into the valley. Trees three feet in girth, which evidently had stood from fifty to a hundred years,

were uprooted and swept away, and huge boulders rolled upon their sites.

Many of the more efficient pioneers who had brought money, experience and ability to the development of the lode were ruined in a single night. Among them was the mining lawyer, William M. Stewart. He had already acquired a half interest in a mine at Gold Hill, and had built one mill in Gold Canyon and another on the Carson River. He had refused an offer of five hundred thousand dollars for his holdings only a month before the great storm. Now the mills were swept away and the mine filled with rubble and water.

Stewart announced that he had lost five hundred thousand dollars in a single night. Perhaps he had. A mine or mill was worth then, as now, what one could get for it. And certainly upon the day after the flood Stewart could get nothing for his property. He had himself been active in the operation of both mills and mine. There were men upon his pay-roll and mules at his feed-boxes. He had neither money for the men nor grain for the mules. But already he had a commanding influence upon the Comstock.

He tested his credit with a boarding-house keeper and found it adequate. He tested it again with a hay dealer and found it sufficient. The boarding-house keeper agreed to feed the men for a time on credit and the hay dealer agreed to feed the mules, with barley costing two bits a pound. And Stewart's credit was not limited to the Comstock. He had made a name

for himself in various parts of California, and numbered among his friends one Chris Reis of San Francisco. Reis was well to do. Stewart determined to find him, obtain working capital by a mortgage on the mining property, clean out the diggings, pay off his local obligations and resume operations.

But San Francisco was three hundred miles away, across the Sierras. It was December and the high mountains were deep with snow. The road, to be sure, was better than that fearsome trail which had cost the life of Ethan Allen Grosh on a similar quest for funds a few years earlier, but it was no garden path. Regular traffic had been stopped by the mountain storms. Stewart, undaunted, faced the ordeal on foot and alone. No better evidence of the man's giant strength could be offered.

With the storm still raging, the lawyer set forth, and reached the stage station known as "Yank's" on the Salisbury grade that night. A hundred men were crowded into the station houses, waiting for the storm to pass. Stewart rolled in a blanket upon the floor, and greeted the day with undiminished energy. The mountain road was buried, with drifts in spots to the height of the telegraph poles. Stewart bucked the drifts, and reached the summit. A valley and another summit lay beyond him.

Pausing for breath upon the height, he made out the figure of a man staggering toward him through newly falling snow. It was a man whom he knew, one of the Salisbury brothers for whom the grade was

named. Salisbury had fought his way across the mountains from California. He warned Stewart that the way was now impassable, that no human being could make it.

In strength and stamina Stewart evidently felt himself more than human, and with some justification. He rejected the advice, and plunged on. He had gone less than two hundred yards, according to his own subsequent account, when the roar of an avalanche behind him made him turn. Dimly through the falling snow he saw Salisbury running. Then the avalanche swept over the man. It was six months later when the last of the melting snow disclosed the broken body.

Stewart shook his head, and waded onward, sighting from tree to tree in order to keep his course straight. So after weary hours he reached the easier going of Strawberry Flat, and came in the darkness to the Strawberry Hotel, a fairly commodious way station. A comfortable bunk under the slab roof, and a huge breakfast of ham, eggs, flapjacks and coffee prepared him for another day of tremendous labors.

Rain alternating with snow had filled each wash and ravine with a raging torrent. Avalanches and landslides roared down the slopes before and behind the traveler. Stewart labored on, watching carefully the ground beneath his feet, and the tottering trees and slipping earth and snow on every hand. The second summit was passed, and the south fork of the



American river lay below him, a thousand feet down. The traveler stopped to breathe and absorb the spectacle. The earth quivered under him. Trees swayed above. The ground was slipping. The river leaped to engulf it.

Stewart turned and ran. Snow, rocks, earth and giant trees swept over the spot where he had stood and roared down the precipitous slope to the river. Beyond its path of ruin he could see the swaying walls of another stage station. When the avalanche had passed he picked his way across the muddy swath for an eighth of a mile to the ruined station. Horses and barns had been carried away, but the station proper stood, sagging upon the edge of ruin. Its people were paralyzed with fright.

Stewart dragged them back to something near coherence by demanding food. Hot coffee and bread were forthcoming, and the undaunted Comstocker went on. Now his path lay steadily downward, and almost clear of snow. Walking and running, he reached the town of Placerville, well down on the western slopes of the Sierras. He had accomplished the impossible. But he was far from through. The storm which had almost destroyed the Comstock had been equally severe on the western slope of the mountains. The Sacramento Valley was a flowing lake. The traveler purchased a horse and rode to Folsom at the edge of the flood, only to find the railroad to Sacramento washed away. He waded his horse for miles to a rise of ground a few miles from the town

of Sacramento, where he found two boatmen. He traded his horse for a boat and rowed to the town, only to find it standing in water up to its second stories.

A friend welcomed him to a bed and uncooked food. The next day dawned, still raining. River steamers had left their moorings and were wandering widely across the valley in search of refugees. An itinerant boatman was found and hired to go in search of a steamer bound for San Francisco. Stewart stood in the stern and hailed each passing steamer as it circled barns and orchards until at last he found passage to the city. That evening he found his friend, Chris Reis, obtained thirty-two thousand dollars on a mortgage on his mine, and started back to Sacramento.

The man was of brass, as the *Gold Hill News* described him. A week after he had left the discouraged party of a hundred men at Yank's, waiting out the storm, he was back among them, with such a journey to his credit as few human beings have ever made. The waiting men would not believe his tale. But the thirty-two thousand dollars was convincing evidence. Stewart had no difficulty in satisfying the boarding-house keeper, or the hay dealer who had fed his mules.

Already the Comstock was recovering from its first major catastrophe. With the resilience of youth and enthusiasm, it cleaned the boulders from its shafts, the mud from its floors, the débris from its

mills, and went merrily on. Within ten days after his return, Stewart sold his mine for sixty thousand dollars.

Of such fiber were the men who built Virginia City. Can one imagine a business man of this modern day either willing or able to climb over blizzard-swept mountains and work his way through avalanches and floods on a six-hundred-mile trip in one week to rescue even the greatest of businesses from ruin? Only a physical giant could have accomplished that journey. With such men among its citizens the town of Virginia could survive almost any disaster.

As a town it was growing self-conscious. Shortly after Stewart's return it was incorporated by an act of the Utah legislature, January 16, 1861. Corporate powers and duties were vested in a board of five trustees. Nine sets of candidates appeared on the ticket for the first municipal election.

The elected board was inducted into office in time to welcome James W. Nye, first governor of the newly created Territory of Nevada. The trustees did the honors bravely. Escorted by the Virginia City brass band and the Virginia Union Guards, a uniformed militia organization, the trustees rode in state to the head of Gold Canyon where it was joined by the Gold Hill Guards. The united pageant stood at attention before the incoming governor while the band played *Hail to the Chief*. The guards presented arms, the trustees arose in their carriages with heads uncovered, and the populace cheered.

The procession, with the governor's carriage surrounded by a guard of honor, then moved over the ridge from Gold Hill to Virginia City, "under a splendid arch made by the ladies of the city," greeted by vociferous cheers and irregular salvos of guns. At Union Square the orator of the day welcomed Governor Nye in behalf of the city, and the governor replied amid continuous cheering. Then followed a "splendid" dinner at the International Hotel, with another orgy of speeches and toasts. Everything was "splendid."

The good citizens of Virginia seemed to be realizing their hope that the occasion would pass without any untoward incident which might indicate to the new governor the youthful crudity of their enthusiasms when an argument developed before the door of the International Hotel.

A contemporary account says "a citizen named Butler made himself too prominent with his pistol. A deputy sheriff, John Williams, undertook the disagreeable duty of arresting him, when the usual impromptu Washoe duel took place. Williams was the best marksman, for in less than a minute Butler received one ball in the side of his knee and one in his shoulder, while a third scraped his face roughly. Then he yielded, somewhat to the disgust of the onlookers who did not consider him entitled to withdraw on the score of being seriously wounded."

Probably the incident was not especially disturbing or surprising to Governor Nye. No doubt he had

been advised that there was still room for improvement in the city government of Virginia.

"Williams was a good example of the irregular police," Eliot Lord's history comments, "always ready to take part in a fight, but loath to spoil one by untimely interference. In default of any better method of settling a dispute, trial by combat was practically accepted as satisfactory to the general public . . . for there was no prison in the city and consignments to the community jail at Carson were simply farcical. Until November, 1861, this place of confinement was a little log shanty, standing among the principal drinking saloons, from which with slight help from confederates, or unassisted, criminals of ordinary activity escaped at will, and their recapture was seldom attempted. The conviction of a murderer by an ordinary jury was an anomaly, and capital punishment by process of law had never been inflicted in Carson County or the new Territory (1863)."

Murder generally was punished or avenged by vendettas. Many of the residents of the Comstock district in those early days were immigrants from below the Mason and Dixon line. Vendettas and feuds were familiar to their thought. It seemed logical and proper to them to make vengeance upon a murderer a personal matter. The results frequently were startling. One Virginia City lawyer in 1861 traced thirteen consecutive deaths growing out of one untried

murder case. This reign of lawlessness culminated in the death of one John Blackburn, a Territorial Marshal. Blackburn was a terror to the desperadoes. He was a man of extraordinary physical courage, of athletic build, quick, alert and well armed. Most of the cowardly ruffians of the district gave Blackburn a wide berth.

He had proved his ability in numerous knife and gun encounters when one evening he was standing in a crowded saloon in Carson City. A desperado named Mayfield shouldered through the throng and pulled a bowie-knife before the marshal. Blackburn drew a pistol but was so hampered by the crowd that he was stabbed fatally before he could fire. The murderer escaped, was captured, broke jail and escaped again. Eventually he was killed in a saloon brawl in Montana.

The murder of Blackburn, however, so aroused public opinion that the first district territorial court actually tried, convicted and punished several criminals, and a new jail was built in Carson City to check the repeated scandals of jail breaks. It was made effective by chaining all prisoners to a huge beam running the length of the main room. At one time in its history sixteen prisoners, nine of whom had been convicted of murder, were chained to this beam.

Virginia City was improving. It discarded its first charter after a year and was reincorporated with an improved charter. In the meantime a foretaste of its great future appeared with the new rush to Washoe

early in 1861, a rush which differed greatly from that of the previous spring. In numbers it was much smaller. In excitement it was comparatively cold. But in the quality of its men and the value of its burdens of freight it was far greater.

## CHAPTER VI

### BUSINESS AND THE LAW CLASH

WITH the passing of the first year of silver production on a large scale in the Comstock district, the men, the mills and the business of the country were getting well down to business. Deidesheimer having solved the problem of timbering the vast ore chambers, and various mill men having developed recovery processes which outclassed the original crude arrastras, the actual work of taking out the fortunes available in the lode proceeded more profitably than the most optimistic pioneers of the previous year had imagined possible.

The road to Placerville and the chief source of supplies had been so improved that four hundred four-horse teams were employed in freighting through the summer. Virginia City had everything it needed and much that it did not need in the way of food, drink, clothing, machinery and building material. The mines were producing enough to pay for these supplies and give a profit to some companies. But the chaotic condition of local and territorial government, and the inadequacy of courts and records, were proving a great handicap to progress.

Lawsuits over mining titles were tying up pro-



duction in some of the richest workings. When the suits did not stop production, hand to hand battles frequently did so. When J. Ross Browne, a mining expert and writer of the time, entered Virginia City he found a crowd "engaged in a lawsuit. . . . The arguments used on both sides were empty whisky bottles. . . . Several of the disputants had already been knocked down and convinced, and various others were freely shedding their blood in the cause." The records indicate that this situation was typical.

Here were mines appraised by the best available engineers at from one million dollars to ten million dollars each—an appraisal which eventual production proved far too small. And with the vague mining laws and inadequate records of the day, two or more companies frequently were claiming the same ground. Too many location notices had been written and claims recorded to cover "this vein with all its dips, spurs, angles and variations."

The Comstock lode lay in a fissure about four miles long and from two hundred to fifteen hundred feet in width, filled with vast bodies of stone and clay, between which at irregular intervals lay the silver-bearing ore. The ore of course lay at various angles and in veins of various width and length. A shaft might follow a rich vein down one hundred feet and find it pinched out between walls of barren rock, or bent sharply to the right or left. An adjacent shaft might sink a hundred feet through country rock and then strike the vein which had been followed down

by the adjoining mine. So it developed in a score of instances, and always there ensued a battle, as both groups of miners claimed the ore. In the absence of adequate courts, such battles developed into hand-to-hand encounters as often as they progressed to legal argument and adjudication.

The original locators and miners clung to the principle that their claims should follow the vein, wherever it might lead. The later purchasers and developers insisted that the rights as defined on the surface must extend straight downward, regardless of the turn of the ore.

The rich surface deposits of the Ophir, Mexican and others led downward at an angle toward the west. A little distance away toward the west other companies were following another vein straight downward. Two met and clashed one hundred and seventy-five feet underground. Both companies, the Ophir and the McCall, had money. Bloody noses and black eyes among the miners quickly convinced the owners that the dispute had better be settled in the courts, such as they were, before it led to murder. Ophir engaged William M. Stewart, who already had impressed his rugged fighting personality upon the district. Stewart filed suit to dispossess the McCall interests on what was known as the Middle lead, and to establish the Ophir's title to the ore. The suit came to trial before Judge Cradlebaugh in the little town of Genoa in the Carson Valley.

Interest was intense throughout the Comstock as

a precedent which would affect the entire district was anticipated. The tiny room commonly used for the court could not hold one-tenth of the eager spectators. Court was moved to a loft over a livery stable which would accommodate the crowd. Several hundred men filled the court-room, and almost every man was armed. The fact that the court admitted them, pistols and all, is sufficient evidence of its limited ability to insure justice.

But apparently Judge Cradlebaugh had sufficient personal authority to prevent gun-play in the court-room. The only shooting which attended the trial was directed at witnesses on their way to and from the scene. Plaintiff and defendant were equally willing to ignore this, and the discreet judge knew of it only by hearsay.

Stewart's opponent in the case was the notorious David S. Terry, a fiery Kentuckian who had been on the Supreme Court Bench of California. Terry was a man of imposing size and violent temper. He was known as a fighter, having killed Senator David Broderick of San Francisco in a duel only the year before. He had come to the Comstock with a group of southerners and seized surface claims on an outcropping parallel to that on which the Ophir had been opened.

The Terry group had actually fortified their claims, and announced their intention of holding the property by force if necessary. Their contention was that the vein which they held was distinct from

the main lode upon which the Ophir was working. The Ophir maintained that the whole Comstock was one lode, and the manner in which it was divided near the surface was of no importance.

On this basis the trial progressed to a disagreement of the jury. No precedent was set. Apparently only Stewart profited. Soon he was collecting legal fees of two hundred thousand dollars annually.

Eventually Ophir bought out the McCall claims and continued to mine. For the moment the chief result of the trial was to convince the miners that they must settle their own differences. While scores of suits were filed, the men below ground worked on the theory that might was right. When fists would not settle the difficulty for a day to allow a particularly rich deposit to be stoped out and hoisted, pick handles were brought into play. When pick handles failed to clear the drifts and stopes so that the embattled miners might mine instead of battle, "stink-pots" copied from the Chinese were used. It was the origin of gas warfare underground.

Professional fighting men were hired in some places at wages as high as ten dollars a day—more than double the wage of the miners themselves. These mercenaries, armed with guns and knives, drove opposition miners from disputed sections and held them back while their own men worked frantically to pick down and haul away the richest ore.

One such professional fighting man is worthy of description. He was the notorious Sam Brown, whose

name appears in numerous scandalous incidents of the early days of Virginia City. He had drifted in with other bad men from the California placers in the summer of 1860, and had immediately proclaimed himself a "chief" of the barroom ruffians, announcing frequently that he had killed more than a dozen men in his career, and exhibiting a bowie-knife with which he said the deeds had been committed. But there were several such self-constituted "chiefs" in the camp, and Brown was not especially noticed among them.

This piqued his vanity, and after a few days of boasting he essayed to prove his title by picking a fight with an insignificant loafer in one of the saloons and literally carving him to pieces with the bowie-knife. To impress the citizenry still further, Brown then stretched himself upon a table and went to sleep while the remains of his victim were gathered up from the floor. It was a simple matter for such a man to get a job as a professional fighter when such fighters were needed.

Though a bully and a braggart, suspected by many of being a coward, Brown unquestionably was feared. Even such a man as William Stewart took no chances with him. On one occasion Stewart met him at close quarters, with entertaining results. The lawyer had been engaged to arbitrate a mining dispute, and with the principals had retired into the tiny back room of the Devil's Gate Toll House in Gold Canyon.

The witnesses were telling their stories when a



*Dressler photo.*

WELLS, FARGO & COMPANY BUILDING IN VIRGINIA CITY.

Through which some hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of bullion was shipped. This photograph was taken after the big bonanza but while iron door and shutters were still intact.



*Dressler photo.*

A STREET SCENE IN VIRGINIA CITY WHEN NEWS OF A NEW BONANZA WAS EXCITING THE TOWN.



clattering of spurs and a loud voice were heard from the bar which occupied the front end of the little house. Stewart recognized the voice as that of Brown. The sounds indicated that the "chief" was primed for trouble.

William Stewart was no man to run from trouble. Like all the provident citizens of the Comstock, he carried arms. It is a sidelight on the man's character that his weapons were derringers, which fired a single heavy ball, the shock of which would be likely to put a man out of commission even if it did not kill him, something which a hard-pressed man could not be sure of with a light bullet. The derringers were accepted as the only sufficiently efficient weapon except a knife for close-range fighting. Naturally they were the weapons carried by a man of Stewart's type, one in either pocket of his overcoat.

So when he heard the voice of Brown, and realized the close quarters in which any encounter must occur, he cocked his pistols in his pockets, and waited, with the guns pointed at the door.

Brown swaggered into the room and demanded to be sworn as a witness. Stewart agreed, had the man sworn, and examined him on his evidence. The testimony concluded, the parties to the arbitration adjourned to the barroom, with Brown in the lead, and Stewart bringing up the rear. The lawyer had previously denounced the "chief" and was expecting trouble. He took no chances, but walked into the bar with both derringers trained on the bad man.



Brown used the common method of provoking a quarrel by demanding that Stewart take a drink with him. The lawyer wisely agreed. They drank and Brown departed, declaring profanely that Stewart was a great lawyer and a smart man, and that they would soon be friends and business associates. That was almost his last appearance.

A day or two later the bad man stopped for dinner at a freight station operated by a man named Van Sickles in the Carson Valley. Invariably quarrelsome with men whom he thought he might intimidate, Brown cursed the waiter for the manner of his service, and knocked the man down with the barrel of his pistol. Van Sickles, a mild and peace-loving man, protested. Thereupon Brown drew a second gun and fired upon his host. But the bad man was a knife fighter, and his bullet went wild. Van Sickles dodged out of the room and escaped. Brown swaggered out, mounted and went on his way.

But when he had aroused the quiet Van Sickles he had started a potential terror. The station keeper waited only to let the killer out of pistol-shot, and then hurried back to his own arsenal and selected a shotgun loaded with buckshot. He mounted a good horse and set out on the trail, turning aside through the sage-brush to circle the bad man and reach the next station before him. Toward dusk he reached the station and entered the barn. The killer arrived a few minutes later, and according to custom rode directly through the wide door. Before he could

dismount, the muzzle of a shotgun pressed into his ribs. Van Sickles waited only long enough to allow Brown to realize his finish, and pulled the trigger. The "chief" fell dead. Van Sickles was elected the first sheriff of Douglas County.

All trouble makers were not removed so expertly. The battles became almost as dangerous as the suits. Bajazette and Golden Era miners cut a drift into the Grass Valley mine, rushed the enemy with pick handles and drove them to the surface. The Keystone waged its war on the surface, drove away the adjacent Peerless miners, and filled the Peerless shaft with waste rock. Then they descended their own shaft, leaving an armed guard at the mouth, and proceeded to clean out the disputed ground. That worked so well that the Uncle Sam did the same thing for the Centerville.

The weaker groups, unable to stand up to a barrage of guns, knives and clubs, started sulphur smudges which filled the enemy's workings with fumes and stopped production completely. Yellow Jacket miners opened a drift into the Gentry shaft and smoked out their rivals. Gentry workers retaliated with such a volume of stinking gas that every connecting mine on the lode was filled, and fumes writhed upward from the ground throughout the town until merchants and householders protested bitterly at the odors which swept almost every house.

Such a situation could not continue indefinitely. Gradually the fighters were withdrawn and the own-

ers decided to abide by the judgment of the courts. There it was discovered that many of the suits were virtually no more than blackmail. The Grosh Gold and Silver Mining Company, for instance, was organized and capitalized at ten million dollars with the frank purpose of seizing thirty-seven hundred and fifty feet of ground in the best part of the Comstock on the basis of a vague claim of the Grosh brothers' original discovery of the lode. Stock in the company was peddled to provide funds for the battle. Suits were filed and pressed against all the companies working on that section of the lode. It soon became evident that the Grosh brothers' untimely deaths had prevented them from securing title to the ground, even if they had discovered it, and the suits were lost. Again the lawyers alone profited.

The chaotic condition of justice was revealed vividly in some of the suits. Billy Chollar sued the adjoining Potosi Company for its four hundred feet of rich ground. The case was set to come before Judge Gordon N. Mott in the First District Court.

The Potosi Company officials believed that both Judge Mott and Chief Justice Turner were biased in favor of the Chollar Company. They therefore sought to obtain the appointment of James W. North, a lawyer friendly to them, to the place of Mott. At the psychological moment Mott resigned, and North was appointed to the bench. The method of this legal accomplishment is indicated in a blunt statement published in *The Territorial Enterprise*:

"We assert that Judge North's place on the bench was bought for him. The price paid was \$25,000. The payee was Gordon N. Mott. The person paying it was John Atchison in behalf of the Potosi company. We believe there was some flimsy pretext of railroad business which glossed over the payment of the money to Mott, but it will not be pretended that the object of paying Mott was any other than to get North on the bench."

That the newspaper's assertion, which was endorsed by the rival *Gold Hill News*, was accurate is indicated by the fact that damages for libel were neither sued for nor collected.

Most of Judge North's rulings favored the Potosi Company. In a subsequent suit growing out of this, Stewart, still counsel for the plaintiff against the Potosi interests, decided that the jury was packed and bribed against him. Some of Stewart's amazing success may be better understood in the light of his handling of this situation.

He suspected the bailiff, a former race jockey named Billy Brown, who was in charge of the jury, but realized that the bailiff would not dare to tell the truth. To provide against that difficulty, the lawyer purchased a locally famous race-horse and tied it just outside his window. Then he interviewed the bailiff.

The ex-jockey was torn between avarice and fear. If he gave the lawyer the requested details of the brib-

ing of the jury, he might earn a fat fee. The fee would not save his life if any of the bribed jurors traced the information to him, which seemed inevitable.

Stewart indicated the way out of this quandary by indicating the fast horse, saddled, bridled and tied in the street below. The ex-jockey realized that no one could catch him on that horse. A reward of fourteen thousand dollars in greenbacks in addition to the horse completed his undoing.

He told the story of the bribery in detail, seized his fourteen-thousand-dollar fee, mounted the horse and vanished, nevermore to be seen upon the Comstock.

Armed with his detailed information Stewart faced the jury in the argument on the following day with supreme confidence. He began his argument with a discussion of the two theories involved, that of many separate veins in the lode, upon which the surface rights extended straight downward, and that of a single deposit of ore, which the surface workers had a legal right to follow, with all its dips, spurs and angles.

Counsel for the Potosi Company had concentrated their witnesses and based their argument upon the many-ledge theory, which was most popular in the district as it promised to give more men working titles in the ore. The court-room was crowded and the spectators were evidently delighted at the apparent trend of the case. They believed Stewart's innocuous

opening argument to be in effect a confession of failure.

But the wily Stewart had been playing with his auditors. Abruptly he changed his tone and his method, and approached the first juror of the eight whom he had been told were bribed. Shrewdly charging no one with bribery or the acceptance of bribes, the lawyer approached the subject with generalities to indicate the importance of this case before the court.

Illustrating his points he repeated presumably imaginary conversations between venal jurors and unscrupulous litigants. But each conversation so offered dealt shrewdly with the exact amount of money each juror had received, the method of his approach and the manner of his acceptance. By the time counsel had finished this byplay of argument the eight bribed jurors were satisfied that he had sufficient evidence to send them to the penitentiary. Stewart then finished his argument on the merits of the case.

The jury disagreed, and while Stewart did not win his case in court, he accomplished the chief purpose of his clients. Potosi stock fell to five dollars a share, and the lawyer wired his clients in San Francisco to buy control. They did so, and avoided necessity of another suit.

Such was the practise of law, and the procedure of the territorial courts of the time. Judges were ignorant and frequently venal. Stewart openly denounced

Judge North and Chief Justice Turner as corrupt, and Judge Locke as too ignorant for any authority. He obtained documentary evidence of a five-thousand-dollar bribe paid to Turner, and when disbarment proceedings came before the Supreme Court first North and then Turner resigned. Locke, under pressure, followed immediately.

Still the battles raged. The Burning Moscow suit was famous. The company claimed twenty-four hundred feet between Central and Virginia ledges. Its stock was boomed on the San Francisco exchange and its war chest was full. It brought suit against the Ophir. The Garrison, the Whitbeck and the McCall companies followed. Ophir eventually bought out the three smaller companies and continued the fight against Burning Moscow. The courts of Nevada and California rocked with the battle. Burning Moscow sank a million dollars in the litigation. In the same period it spent enough in the physical exploration of its claims to prove that they were virtually worthless. Its stock fell from four hundred dollars to five dollars a share, and Ophir bought it out at that figure. In similar manner most of the legal troubles over mining titles eventually were settled.

The twelve leading mines of the district were parties to two hundred and forty-five separate suits. The cost of the litigation has been estimated conservatively at ten million dollars. The figure is easy to believe when we know that a single fee of one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars was paid to William

M. Stewart by the Belcher Company. General Thomas H. Williams, a lawyer who rivaled Stewart, retired from the contest worth five million dollars, the market value of mining property which he had accepted as fees.

Slowly out of the turmoil came stability. Such sensational suits and hand-to-hand battles as marked those early days of Virginia City helped to advertise the Comstock throughout the world almost as much as did the actual silver production. It all helped to keep the district in the limelight and maintain public interest in its productive mines.

While the vast amount of litigation was so expensively serving its purpose of shaking out the crooks, blackmailers and pikers, with the establishment of unimpeachable titles to the best properties, the lust for easy wealth was serving a similar end by concentrating attention upon the Comstock lode proper.

Even after the first boom and slump in 1860 the excitement was sufficient to make it easy for smooth-tongued promoters to interest capital in mining possibilities throughout Nevada. Millionaires were few enough in the early 'sixties so that the fame of one hundred such fortunes among the one hundred thousand residents of California, all made in the gold-rush, was known throughout the land. It was easy for imaginations to multiply the reports of similar fortunes in Nevada.

Eastern capitalists combined with western, and between them lured thousands of small investors to



put their savings into the exploration of hundreds of miles of Nevada desert. The enthusiasm which attended the announcement of new strikes was astonishing. There seemed to be no limit to the credulity of the public. Mark Twain's description of the excitement and strenuous efforts of himself and friends in the Esmeralda district, in *Roughing It*, is not only vivid but accurate. And Mark Twain's experience was only one of thousands.

Literally millions of dollars were thrown into the ground in Esmeralda. A city grew like a mushroom, and wilted and died almost as quickly. In the Palmyra and Indian Springs districts the sage-brush gave way to promising towns overnight, and overnight the towns in turn gave way to the sage-brush. In the Pine Woods district eastern capitalists bought lava outcroppings at the price of ore. Marietta and the Panamints lured their victims and cast them out, broken and broke. In the environs of Virginia City itself ten million dollars obtained from the sale of promotion stock and subsequent assessments upon the stockholders was spent in sinking shafts and running drifts in worthless ground. But even greater days were impending.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RISE OF LUXURY, LETTERS AND CRIME

DESPITE their troubles, the great mines of the Comstock lode continued to produce silver in such quantities that fortunes were being made daily. Word of such fortunes was sounded throughout the world. The incident of Sandy Bowers, to whom Comstock claimed to have given a tiny share in the lode, is typical.

Bowers, a Gold Hill placer miner before the discovery of the Comstock, owned ten feet of ground on the Gold Hill end of the lode. The camp laundress owned ten feet adjoining. Bowers, taking his cue from the mergers going on all around him, married the laundress. Or perhaps she married him. She had had some experience, having married and divorced two Mormons since her immigration from Scotland. Her maiden name was Eilley Orrum.

Bowers was the only one of the original owners of the lode who cashed in a fortune. That must have been due either to chance or to his Scottish wife, as his subsequent activities indicated that he had little more intelligence in the accumulation or handling of money than Old Pancake or Old Virginia. He did, however, retain his holdings while they were producing hun-

dreds of thousands of dollars from the rich bonanza near the surface, mined at minimum cost. The result was wealth beyond the dreams of the miner and the washerwoman.

With long years of toil and poverty behind them, even the imaginations of the couple had been dulled by undernourishment. The best they were able to do in the immediate display of wealth was the construction of a palatial home in Washoe Valley, near the ugly camp which had given them riches. With the stimulus of attendant publicity, the Bowers' imagination arose to greater heights.

They chartered the International Hotel, Virginia City's best, to provide a banquet worthy of their affluence. Every person of any importance in the camp was invited. Every luxury which San Francisco could provide was ordered, and San Francisco was already famed throughout the world as a center of extravagance. The party was literally a howling success. Not the least of its features was Bowers' speech, duly reported in *The Territorial Enterprise*:

"I've had powerful good luck in this country, but now I've got money to throw at the birds. Ther arn't no chance for a gentlemen to spend his coin in this country, an' so me and Mrs. Bowers is goin' to Yoorup to take in the sights. Ther arn't many folks worth seein' in America. Mebbe Horace Greeley and likewise Governor Nye and old Winnemucca. But what we've really set our hearts on is seein' the Queen of

England and all the other great folks of them countries."

So Sandy and Mrs. Bowers departed for "Yoorup" in a blaze of glory, and did their part toward spreading the fame of the Comstock and attracting the money of investors from both sides of the Atlantic. The fact that he continued to throw his money at the birds made him a perfect publicity agent for a mining town. The facts that his mine ceased to pay after a few years, that Sandy died, and that Mrs. Bowers, reduced to poverty, became widely known as "The Seeress of Washoe," are beside the point.

The Bowers incident is merely illustrative of the spirit of the time and place. Another mining man put door-knobs of solid silver throughout his house, some sixty-five years ahead of Frankie Lake, an early bootleg beer baron of Chicago. Human nature has not changed. The superintendent of the Overman mine in his first days of riches filled his water tank with champagne for the guests at a wedding. The offices, residences and even the stables of the officials of the leading mines were constructed and decorated with an extravagance unprecedented. Men who had never bestrode a saddle animal better than a mule appeared in the streets of Virginia City on thoroughbred horses. Men who had never read a line of literature better than that of *The Territorial Enterprise* bought whole libraries bound in morocco. Whatever was most costly in the way of food, drink,

apparel and furnishing was considered a necessity.

When an itinerant preacher offered his first sermon on a corner of the rising camp the hat which he passed came back to him literally filled with silver and gold. When a traveling stock company from Salt Lake City introduced the drama to the town in a play called *Swiss Swains*, the financial reward left the actors literally gasping. One may be sure that the story which such artists carried on did the reputation of Virginia City no harm. All that mad extravagance, all that fury of litigation, all that wildcat exploration and failure of surrounding territory, all that feverish activity of construction served to define the Comstock lode and start it definitely on its way to a spectacular place in the history of the West.

The incidental activities and business of a city develop contemporaneously and naturally. *The Territorial Enterprise*, started as a weekly newspaper in the village of Genoa in December of 'fifty-eight, came by way of Carson to Virginia City in November of 1860. *The Evening Chronicle* appeared at about the same time, and *The Gold Hill News* covered the same territory. Thereafter the history of the Comstock was a matter of daily record. Only one complete file of *The Territorial Enterprise*, owned by a collector in Salt Lake City, is known to be extant. The Bancroft Library at the University of California treasures an incomplete file. There also are files of *The News* and *The Chronicle* to assist students of history in the making.

*The Enterprise*, as the journalistic school of Mark Twain, C. C. Goodwin, and Dan DeQuille (William Wright) soon led the field. Its first office in Virginia City was a small frame building with a lean-to on one side, provided with bunks, a kitchen stove and a Chinese cook for the staff. Its columns included not only reports of the activities of the mines and mills but a striking revelation of the social life of the day.

Of Mark Twain's apprenticeship as a cub reporter in Virginia City so much has been written that it has become almost legendary. He himself has gone into it at considerable length in *Roughing It*. On the whole the picture he has drawn there is accurate, though its details are colored by his imagination and sense of humor.

*The Enterprise* office was almost a club for the members of its staff. They were a jovial, irresponsible, light-hearted crew, thoroughly impregnated with the gambling spirit typical of the Virginia City of their day. After the paper was put to bed in the small hours of the morning they gathered with visiting celebrities or congenial spirits of the town and made merry with guitar and banjo and song assisted by an ample supply of lager beer, and occasionally planned their campaigns of journalistic horseplay. Their humor was largely of the practical joke variety, and lengths to which they would go to formulate such jokes were astonishing.

Mark Twain had joined this interesting aggregation as a result of letters written to *The Enterprise*

while he was burning in the high fever of the wildcat camp of Aurora, one of the most excited offshoots of the Comstock. Broke and in debt after his mining ventures, Clemens somewhat against his inclination and judgment accepted an offer from Joseph T. Goodman, owner and editor of *The Enterprise*, to join its local staff at a wage of twenty-five dollars a week.

He had walked one hundred and thirty miles across the desert in mid-summer, carrying his personal belongings on his back from Aurora to Virginia City to take the job. How well he fitted into the job and into the hectic life of the Comstock may be understood by the reader of his own account in *Roughing It*.

Senator William M. Stewart has left in his *Reminiscences*, a less eulogistic account of the appearance and work of Mark Twain in those untrammelled days of cub reporting, than is indicated by the admirers of Clemens. Stewart's memory of the budding journalist pictures an unkempt, lazy, inconsiderate individual who would rather write about men and events from his imagination than to take the trouble to obtain facts.

Complete indifference to the ill effects of his diatribes was one of the outstanding features of Mark Twain's writing in those early days, according to Stewart. An excuse entirely satisfactory to Twain, the senator maintained, was that he was paid a salary to write, and that therefore he wrote, and inasmuch as he himself had no personal malice toward any one

whom he might ridicule in print the object of such ridicule should bear no malice toward him.

Such an argument would have been quite in keeping with the spirit of the times and the journalism of *The Enterprise*. Fake stories and practical jokes were unquestionably an outstanding feature of the newspaper. Albert Bigelow Paine's biography of Mark Twain covers this phase of the humorist's experience and training on the Comstock in minute detail.

The same authority dismisses Stewart's complimentary comments with a brief statement that the senator had never forgiven the humorist for certain liberties taken in print with the senatorial dignity. Perhaps that is true. There is evidence that some of Stewart's memories concerning Twain were not accurate. For instance, he ascribes a practical joke hold-up of Twain to an effort of victims of Twain's pen to avenge themselves upon the writer while he was still a member of *The Enterprise* staff.

The facts are that the hold-up which Stewart describes in a manner calculated to bring ridicule upon Twain did not occur until some time after the author had left *The Enterprise* staff. He had returned to Comstock to give his famous lecture on The Sandwich Islands. His reception had been so flattering and so many persons had been turned away from the hall that his friends begged him to repeat. He refused on the ground that he had no other lecture material. The friends then planned the fake hold-up with the double purpose of giving him material for another



talk, and making it financially necessary for him to speak to refill his emptied purse. It was an idea typical of the Comstock—one in which a short time earlier Mark Twain himself might easily have been a leading spirit. But in this case it went astray, and Twain canceled the second lecture date and left Virginia City at once and forever as soon as he learned of the joke.

It appears that both his conscience and his humor were showing some slight refinement from the crudities of his first reporting days. Study of the newspaper files shows that Samuel Clemens unquestionably was one of the most irresponsible reporters who ever reported, and the fact that *The Territorial Enterprise*, Nevada's leading newspaper, not only tolerated but encouraged his vagaries and similar vagaries on the part of other members of its staff, throws an illuminating light on what was expected and accepted in Comstock journalism.

Further illustrative of this journalism, particularly as practised by Mark Twain, is a story and comment taken from *The Gold Hill News* of October 28 and 29, 1863:

"Horrible! The most sickening tale of horror that we have read for years is told in *The Enterprise* this morning; and were it not for the responsible source from which our contemporary received it, we should refuse it credence. The account is given at length and from our limited space we are compelled to con-

dense it. It is nothing less than the murder of a family consisting of the mother and seven children by the hand of the father, Philip Hopkins, and the suicide of the murderer.

"The unfortunate family resided between Empire City and Dutch Nick's, and Hopkins has been for some time supposed to be insane. About ten o'clock on Monday evening Mr. Hopkins dashed into Carson on horseback, with his throat cut from ear to ear and bearing in his hand a reeking scalp from which the warm smoking blood was dripping, and fell in a dying condition in front of the Magnolia saloon. He expired in the course of five minutes without speaking. The long red hair of the scalp he bore marked it as that of Mrs. Hopkins.

"A number of citizens headed by Herman Gasherie mounted at once and rode down to the Hopkins house where a ghastly scene met their gaze. The scalpless corpse of Mrs. Hopkins lay across the threshold with her head split open and her right hand almost severed from the wrist. Near her lay the axe with which the murderous deed had been committed. In one of the bedrooms six of the children were found, one in bed and the others scattered on the floor. They were all dead. Their brains had evidently been dashed out with a club as every mark about them seemed to have been made with a blunt instrument. Julia and Emma, aged respectively fourteen and seventeen, were found in the kitchen, bruised and insensible, but it is thought their recovery is possible. The eldest girl, Mary, must

have taken refuge in her terror in the garret, as her body was found there frightfully mutilated and with the knife with which her wounds had been inflicted sticking in her side.

"Mr. Curry says Mr. Hopkins was about 42 years of age, and a native of western Pennsylvania. He was always affable and polite, and until very recently he had never heard of his ill-treating his family. He had been a heavy owner in the best mines of Gold Hill and Virginia City but when the San Francisco papers exposed the game of cooking dividends in order to bolster up their stocks, he grew afraid and sold out and invested an immense amount in the Spring Valley Water Company of San Francisco. The stock soon went down to nothing and the ruined man was driven mad by his misfortunes."

That concluded the story of the murder. The next day appeared the following:

"That Sell.—The horrible story of a murder which we yesterday copied in good faith from *The Enterprise* turns out to be a mere witticism of Mark Twain. In short a Lie—entirely baseless and without a shadow of foundation. *The Enterprise* is the pioneer newspaper of the Territory, is more widely known than any other, and having been ably and respectably conducted, has heretofore been considered a reliable medium of information. The terrible tale related in its columns yesterday was believed here and will be

believed everywhere—wherever *The Enterprise* is read. It will be read with sickening horror, and the already bloody reputation of our Territory will receive another smear. When the readers of the soul-sickening story are informed that it was a mere babble of 'wit,' they will feel relieved, although they may utterly fail to see the humor of the point."

Many modern readers no doubt will agree with the concluding reflection of *The Gold Hill News*. Unquestionably Mark Twain's sense of humor in that early day was peculiar, to say the least. He did not have in the editor of *The Enterprise* the wise, gentle, but discriminating critic whom he was later to love and marry, and of whom his biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine, wrote: "For Mark Twain's reputation it would have been better had she exercised her editorial prerogative even more actively."

*The Enterprise* gave to Mark Twain an opportunity to practise the trade of writing for print but despite the local prestige of its editor it gave him little training in the art of letters. The advantages which it afforded were negative rather than positive. It refrained effectively from molding the author's style within the narrow forms of modern news reporting. Witness an example of what purported to be a news story from the Clemens pen, published in *The Enterprise* a little later than the above. Note the freedom between news and comment, fact and opinion, assumed by the writer and permitted by his editor.

"Eight left Virginia yesterday and came down to Dayton with Mr. Sutro. Time 30 minutes—distance 8 or 9 miles. There is nothing very slow about that kind of travel. We found Dayton the same old place but taking up a good deal more room than it did the last time I saw it, and looking more brisk and lively with its increase of business, and more handsome on account of the beautiful dressed stone buildings with which it is being embellished of late.

"Just as we got fairly under way, and were approaching Ball Robert's bridge, Sutro's dog, 'Carlo,' got to skirmishing around in the extravagant exuberance of his breakfast, and shipped up a fight with six or seven other dogs whom he was entirely unacquainted with, had never met before and probably has no desire to meet again. He waltzed into them right gallantly and right gallantly waltzed out again.

"We also left at about this time and trotted briskly across Ball Robert's bridge. I remarked that Ball Robert's bridge was a good one and a credit to that bald gentleman. I said it in a fine burst of humor and more on account of the joke than anything else, but Sutro is insensible to the more delicate touches of American wit, and the effort was entirely lost on him. I don't think Sutro minds a joke of mild character any more than a dead man would. However, I repeated it once or twice without producing any visible effect, and finally derived what comfort I could by laughing at it myself.

"Mr. Sutro being a confirmed business man, replied

in a practical and businesslike way. He said the bridge was a good one, and so were all public blessings of a similar nature when entrusted to the hands of private individuals. He said if the county had built the bridge it would have cost an extravagant sum of money, and would have been eternally out of repair. He also said the only way to get public work well and properly done was to let it out by contract.

“ ‘For instance,’ says he, ‘they have fooled away two or three years trying to capture Richmond, whereas if they had let the job by contract to some sensible business man, the thing would have been accomplished and forgotten long ago.’ It was a novel and original idea and I forgot my joke for the next half hour in speculating upon its feasibility.” . . .

Why a newspaper of the stability and reputation of *The Enterprise* should give space for such rambling reports is almost as difficult to understand as why it should lend itself to such a hoax as the preceding tale. Also it must remain a mystery as to why Mark Twain considered the murder tale either humorous or clever. The explanation given later, that it was designed to rebuke certain San Francisco newspapers for their ill-considered use of news bearing on the Comstock, perhaps was accurate, but never sufficient to overcome the first reaction. There were plenty of real murders to report in Virginia City in those days.

A copy of *The Enterprise* printed not long after

reveals a sufficiently brisk business in shooting, slashing and assault to satisfy the cravings of any cub reporter. One day's record, fully substantiated, cites half a dozen sanguine affairs.

P. H. Dowd, proprietor of the Gem Saloon, quarreled with William Janes, a bartender in Daley's saloon and formerly a partner of Dowd's. Dowd threw a glass tumbler at Janes. Janes hurled his own glass in the face of Dowd. Both men then drew pistols and fired. Both shots went wild but Janes' second shot drilled Dowd through the body. Patrick Cox, a swamper in Dowd's saloon, seeing his boss fall, seized a pistol and fired at Janes, but missed. By this time most of the hangers-on in the barroom were vanishing through doors and windows. Two local officers named Lackey and Terry, however, seized Janes as he was turning his weapon upon Cox, disarmed and arrested him. Janes' first bullet had torn a hole through Cox's vest but had not wounded him.

The second shooting of the day's report occurred between one Jack McNabb and an unidentified stranger in the Clipper Saloon. The stranger was abusing a harmless individual known as "Drunken Jimmy," when McNabb remonstrated. The stranger promptly drew a revolver and fired two shots, one of which went wild while the other was deflected by a packet of letters in McNabb's vest. McNabb's answering shot marked the stranger's forehead but left him sufficient energy to escape.

The third incident of the day's record devel-

between two residents who started with an argument about a chicken fight and finished with a resort to derringers. One man was shot through the hand and the other escaped.

The fourth feature was an ax murder. John Boyd, a wood chopper working in Newton Canyon, a few miles from Virginia City, was found murdered and mangled in his cabin. The murder, according to the newspaper account, was attributed to an Indian in Boyd's employ. The Indian, a pair of blankets, a large butcher knife, a quantity of provisions, and four dollars in cash known to have been in Boyd's pockets were missing.

A fifth item recites: "Gurley, the man who was shot the other night by the fellow Siefeldt is now in a fair way of recovery."

A sixth says: "There was something of a muss Sunday night in a C Street hurdy-house. Grand result: a whipped Mexican and a victorious Irishman. No arrest."

Those were hard men, tough hombres. What they craved was whisky and action. It mattered little what form the action might take. Their pleasures were as hard as their labors, as violent as their passions. Barrooms, gambling-houses, dance-halls and brothels were filled with the motley crowd.

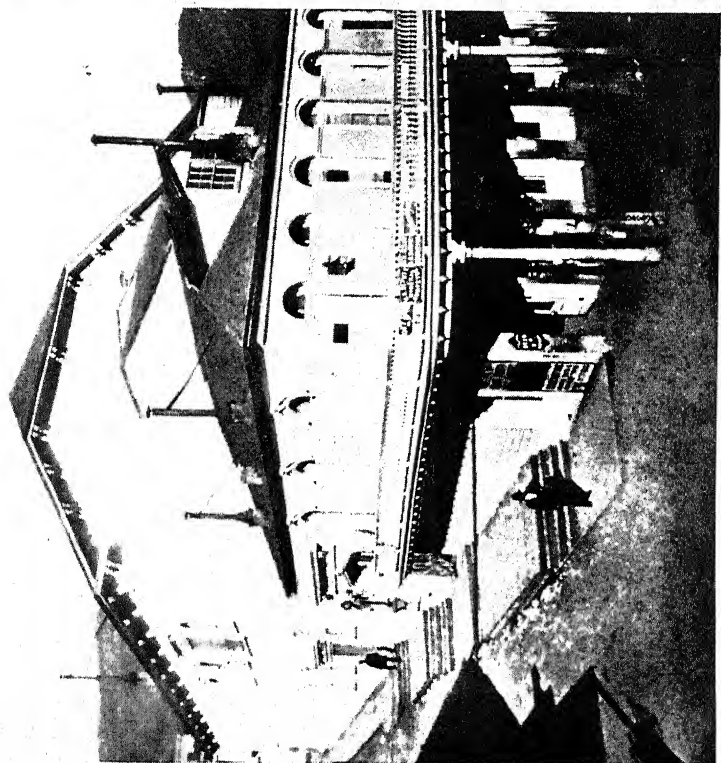
Prize fights were a popular form of entertainment. In one such battle, the pugilists had fought for fourteen rounds in an open-air arena when the referee declared a foul. Practically every man present had



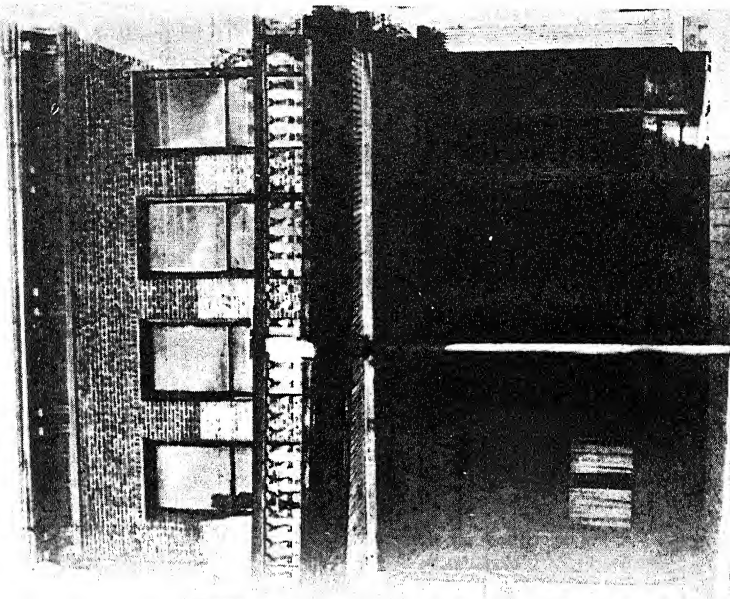
a wager on the fight. They did not purpose to be cheated of their profits by the arbitrary word of a referee. The crowd instantly started a fierce dispute. Within a minute knives and guns were flashing. Pistol-shots combined with yells and curses to complete the confusion. The horses, tied outside the circle, stampeded. Friendship was forgotten. Every man present was engaged in a hand-to-hand battle. It was a scene typical of the men who made up the majority of the population of the Comstock in that day.

The same citizens flocked with equal enthusiasm to see a battle between a bear and four bulldogs at McGuire's Opera House. Another popular contest was a fight between wildcats and bulldogs. *The Enterprise* reported this engagement with all the solemn dignity which it might have given to a serious dramatic performance. For that reason direct quotation from its account should prove illuminating:

"The great wildcat and bulldog fight came off at the Opera House last night according to programme and was witnessed by a full and excited house. . . . There was rigged up on the stage a large cage. Toward the roof of the cage, placed so as to perfectly light up the interior, were eight gas jets. All being in readiness, Fight No. 1 took place. The smallest cat was let into the den and shortly afterward Mr. Gage's large white bulldog, 'Hero.' He went after that cat 'thar and then.' The cat stood his first charge



*Courtesy California State Library.*



*Dressler photo.*



and then began to want to leave. After a few wild plunges about the cage the dog got a square hold on the beast and promptly killed it. . . .”

A second battle resulted in victory for the cat, and a third was staged with a fresh dog. *The Enterprise's* dramatic critic described this contest as “a really terrific battle. The cat now for the first time found it necessary to use her teeth as well as her claws. Over and over they rolled, fighting so rapidly that it reminded one of a big bunch of firecrackers exploding and whirling about. The cat at last began to try to get away, but the spunky little dog kept after her and she had to get down to her work again. The fight lasted over twenty minutes, and finally the dog was victorious, not only whipping but killing the cat.

“The little bulldog was cheered by the crowd and all dispersed declaring the new Opera House troupe a decided success.”

The brutality and crudity of such forms of entertainment, however, did not suffice for all the residents of Virginia City. “The refining influences of the stage were also clearly marked,” according to one contemporary critic. “Well enacted plays of the better class have been as well received on the Comstock Lode as in communities whose pretensions to culture are greater, and an increased sale of standard dramatic literature has been one of the more easily recognized effects of these representations. During the brief engagement of John McCullough at the

Virginia City Theatre, to cite one recent instance, thirty full copies of costly editions of Shakespeare's works were purchased. If performances with slight traces of sense, humor, ingenuity or decency have also been popular, few cities at present could cast the first stone at the Washoe mining towns."

Despite its feverish life and the variety of its population, Virginia City was really settling down. Churches, schools and fraternal organizations were forming. Still, in these first two or three hectic years the town was strangely without any great man or outstanding leadership, unless the young lawyer, William M. Stewart, could be considered great. Mackay, Fair and Sutro were still unmarked among the throngs. John P. Jones, William Sharon and James Flood were unheard of. The fortunes which were coming out of the ground were being scattered with scandalous waste for lack of organization and businesslike direction.

Yet wealth was there in silver ore blocked out to the value of many millions, visible in a dozen mines. It was inevitable that such potential rewards should attract and develop men of business ability sufficient to command a chaotic situation.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MONEY MAKES MORE MONEY

LACKING outstanding leadership in its first excited years of prosperity, the development of the Comstock advanced under economic pressure, without direction. The producing mines supplied great sums of money. At the same time they attracted thousands of workers. The demand for machinery, building materials, mine timbers, and miscellaneous supplies increased steadily.

Supplying of this demand and the consumption of supplies was carried on almost without organization. The waste was appalling. The mine owners, workers and merchants of the district operated with an independence unique in history. The good mines produced money enough to pay for anything, and appeared to produce it from an inexhaustible source. Three hundred, four hundred, five hundred feet down they went, and opened up chamber after chamber of rich ore.

When one pinched out, a neighbor would come in with greater wealth than before. While one delved down through borrasca or barren rock to search for new rewards at deeper levels, another extracted millions from the bonanza in which it found itself.

While one paid dividends running into millions, and expended other millions in continued development, another assessed its stockholders to provide the sinews of its war with nature. In either case money was always available for supplies and pay-rolls.

No untoward difficulties, hardships or tragedies could check the sweeping economic forces which were stimulating development of mines and city. By the close of 1862, forty companies had built shaft houses on the main lode, and twelve were operating steam engines for hoisting and pumping.

The summit of Mount Davidson looked down upon a four-mile line of smoking shaft-houses and mills, and heaps of rock and sand which grew like gigantic ant-hills at the mouth of every pit and tunnel. To carry out the illusion, men, mules, horses and oxen swarmed about these vast dumps, scurrying about on a thousand errands with the same direct and definite purpose as a colony of ants. Trains of men and wagons gathered about the dumps of the chief ore producers, the Ophir, Mexican, Gould & Curry, Chollar, Potosi, and smaller claims, and moved away to give place to others. Wagon-trains moved in and out through the adjacent streets, blocked from time to time by confusion of traffic at a busy corner, and at last escaped toward the mills, while others struggled up the slopes which they had left.

Amid such activities even great physical disasters failed to check the general development. In the summer of 'sixty-three the city trembled from end to

end with the roar and concussion of a great collapse of rock and timber in the Mexican mine. The entire workings, to a depth of two hundred and twenty-five feet, dropped with a force which swept rock and timbers like straw into the adjoining galleries of the Ophir. "The whole mine," wrote an admiring eyewitness, "was a lovely chaos."

More than an acre of ground caved into the shafts, tunnels and stopes below. Fifty feet of the Ophir drifts were obliterated as if by a blast. The galleries of the second and third levels collapsed under the sudden pressure, dragging shaft-houses, machinery and all the surface workings into the pit of ruin. Twenty miners escaped with their lives only by rare good luck.

Later a great collapse at Gold Hill wrecked the upper levels of the Imperial, the Empire and the Eclipse mines. Earth, rock and timbers weighing hundreds of thousands of tons settled into the depths with one mighty crash, producing a concussion which rocked the town of Gold Hill, and which hurled fragments of rock from the three-hundred-foot level of the Imperial mine straight up the shaft to crash against the roof of the hoisting works.

Hardly had the ruin in the Mexican and Ophir works been cleared away sufficiently to allow some resumption of mining when the first disastrous fire swept Virginia City. Nearly half the frame buildings which made up the greater part of the town were laid in smoking ruins. Hundreds of miners were left



homeless, and scores of business houses and incidental activities were cut off in an hour.

No such hardships daunted the energy or enthusiasm of the Comstockers. Promoters, business men and miners alike hurled themselves into the work of restoration. While the ruins smoked above one mine, the rich ore was pouring from the shaft of another to provide the wherewithal for continued growth and development of the community as a whole. Men who had escaped death in a subterranean disaster laughed away the incident and invited friends to drink their health in dozens of riotous saloons.

With such variety of citizenship, labor, trial, difficulty and accomplishment, Virginia City grew and waxed great. Gold Hill, just across the narrow divide at the head of Gold Canyon, was not far behind. Each extended toward the other until they virtually merged.

Dayton, once Chinatown, and before that Mormon Station and other names, became a thriving center of mills and transportation, a few miles below the lode, on the Carson River. Carson City, a few miles more distant on the main route to California assumed airs familiar to modern travelers who have witnessed the booming of real-estate subdivisions in Florida or California.

Amid such activities almost any man could get a job and earn a living. The smallest capitalist could start some business of his own. It was every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. There was a

constantly growing demand for all the necessities and most of the luxuries of life. Quite logically such demand inspired organization to reap its potential profit.

The great toll roads across the Sierras were one of the first developments, and simultaneously came the great transportation companies. The first session of the legislature of the newly organized Territory of Nevada was swamped by applications for toll-road franchises. The rights were granted only to those who could give satisfactory evidence of their financial and engineering ability to build and maintain the roads. Nevada was not yet experienced in the possibilities of politics. Good toll roads had proved their value in the development of California in the preceding decade, and several companies which had constructed and operated them at a profit were eager to repeat their success across the Sierras.

But it was a tremendous task and the franchises were divided among several builders, of which Swan & Company probably was the largest, with an allotment of twenty miles in the mountains. All went to work promptly with large gangs of laborers, mostly recruited from the Chinese coolies who then swarmed on the Pacific Coast. Modern road builders under the direction of county, state and federal government, who point with pride to their engineering achievements would be surprised at the perfection of the mountain grades, cut through rock on precipitous slopes and paved with macadam and slabs fitted as neatly as bathroom tiles, which were the perfected

work of those pioneer road builders of the early 'sixties.

No better indication of their smooth perfection can be given than the vast weight of the numberless wagon-trains which moved over them. Where, in the spring of 1860, pack-mules struggled and were lost between slides, rocks and bottomless mud-holes, eventually teams of ten to twenty mules were hauling wagons with trailers and loads weighing as much as eighty-four thousand pounds. The figures are astounding but beyond question. They are on record in the books of the weigh-masters of the time, who checked the ore freighters from mines to mills.

The business grew to immense proportions as the demands of the Comstock district increased. The wagons extended in an almost unbroken line over the entire hundred miles from Virginia City to Placerville. Frequently, during the summer months, if a wagon broke down or for some other reason was forced out of line its driver might have to wait for hours before he could find sufficient space to move his ten or twenty mules and wagon with two to four trailers into the procession.

Stations which included stables, hotels, blacksmith shops, saloons and stores, sprang up at average intervals of two miles all along the road. The amount of traffic on this colorful highway was almost beyond conception. Comstock-bound wagons carried mountains of machinery, furniture, lumber, provisions and merchandise of all descriptions. Outgoing

wagons, at least until the development of adequate mills to handle all the Comstock ore, carried huge freights of high grade for reduction on the Coast, or even in England, to which it was shipped around the Horn as ballast.

The river of incoming freight began in New York, Philadelphia and Liverpool, coming across the Isthmus of Panama or around Cape Horn to San Francisco, where it was transferred to river steamers, and again transferred at Sacramento to the waiting caravans of Washoe freighters. All along the toll roads smaller streams of traffic converged and added to the flow. Orchards, vineyards, truck gardens, hay, grain and cattle ranches throughout more than a hundred miles of California valley and foot-hill land contributed their quota of freight. Farms which had been abandoned or neglected for years were brought back into production to take advantage of the high prices prevailing throughout Nevada. The farmer's plow team and buckboard vied with the twenty-mule freighters for a place in the Comstock-bound trains.

Swan & Company cleared fifty thousand dollars a year on their toll-road franchises, after paying an average of five thousand dollars a mile for maintenance. The toll for the entire route was fifteen dollars for a four-horse team, and a dollar and a half for each additional animal. The average cost of handling freight from Sacramento to Virginia City in these conditions was six cents a pound. It was something to excite the interest of Huntington, Stanford,

Crocker and Hopkins, then contemplating the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad.

Partly to that interest we owe figures on the amount of traffic involved. The railroad investigators made a careful check and estimated that one hundred million pounds of freight were being hauled over the Placerville route annually, and half that amount over the Downieville route. It was worth building a railroad for. The Sacramento Union in 1863 declared that 2,772 teams, employing 14,652 animals, were regularly employed on the freight routes. Total annual freight costs, which of course included the road tolls, mounted into the millions.

Even more colorful, and little less profitable were the great passenger stages which careened over the mountains to the crack of whips and the shouts of their drivers, punctuated occasionally by the gasps or cries of their passengers. The Pioneer Line held almost a monopoly of passenger transportation on the popular Placerville route. It had entered the field while saddle mules were still substituting for vehicles on the more difficult stretches. As the road improved, the company seized all the best sites for its stations. In these stations it maintained more than six hundred fine horses, and employed scores of hostlers.

The stage drivers were the kings of the highway. They drew salaries as high as two hundred and fifty dollars a month. They spoke only with scorn to the freighters and with condescension to the passengers. The California Company and the Nevada Company

used the route through Downieville, and carried perhaps half as many passengers as the Pioneer. The latter carried twenty thousand passengers a year at a fare of twenty-seven dollars between Sacramento and Virginia City.

The trip became world famous among travelers in the 'sixties. It can be but feebly appreciated now by motorists or auto-stage tourists who follow the Placerville route as far as Lake Tahoe. The difference is not only the difference between a seat upon the top of a swaying stage drawn by six galloping horses, and the interior of a modern closed car. It is the greater difference between a picturesque roadway, alive with colorful movement, and an almost deserted mountain boulevard. Where masked and armed bandits once appeared from the depths of a pine forest and converged upon stage and panic-stricken passengers, only an imposing monument in commemoration of one such spectacular incident now stops the tourist with a bronze tablet to satisfy a fleeting curiosity.

The South Fork of the American River, to be sure, still flashes white and blue in the canyon far below the grade, disappearing and reappearing in the opening vistas of pines and rocks. Patches of snow against black peaks still rise overhead. A haze of heat still films the wide Sacramento Valley from points of exceptional view. It is still a highway of thrilling beauty and inspiration, but it is no longer a pulsing artery in the body of the nation.

Perhaps the Downieville Road, though even less

traveled to-day, gives a better suggestion of what went on through those rugged mountains seventy years ago. There the modern traveler encounters at least the names of such early mining towns as Red Dog, Rough and Ready, Brandy City, and the picturesque remnant of Downieville itself, and Sierraville and Sierra City. The Yuba River below the narrow grade is as beautiful as the American. The pines are as straight and tall. The vistas are as wide and deep. And the atmosphere of the days which made these mountain passes famous throughout the world is more easily conjured up in a dark and ruined village street than upon the present broad pavement which leads from Sacramento through Auburn and across the mountains to Reno.

Even the ability to drive one's private car over the historic routes to-day is a handicap. It is too easy. It tends to put one in a mood scornful of the drivers of that other day, when driving was a profession of high skill and higher honor. The stage-drivers of the 'sixties maintained upon their high seats a position which no aspirant to social honors could scorn. Those drivers would have felt that they were honoring a president of the United States with an invitation to the coveted seat beside them. Such Jehus would have scorned Mrs. Gann's interest in a certain position at the White House table, but would have understood, and perhaps refused, her application for a seat upon the stage box.

They were men of skill and courage as well as social

prominence. The guiding of six-horse stages, frequently at a run, around the curves of those mountain grades required trained hands and eyes, strong arms, and quick judgment. The time they made proves conclusively that they possessed all these attributes. The three-day schedule over the one hundred and sixty-two miles from Sacramento to Virginia City in the first great year of travel was cut to eighteen hours with the improvement of the road. On one occasion, to serve three wealthy mining operators in an emergency, the run was made in twelve hours and twenty minutes, an average of about thirteen miles an hour. Even modern automobiles do not scorn such speed over some parts of the grade to-day.

And on the whole the accidents were less frequent than they are with the more modern conveyances. The plodding freight teams gave right of way to the dashing stages, but droves of cattles were not always so accommodating. Occasionally a wild steer would tangle up the stage horses and upset the coach. On one occasion a grizzly bear, ambling across the road, frightened the team so badly that they wrecked the outfit, though the passengers escaped unhurt. On another occasion only a lone pine, providentially standing below the edge of the grade, saved an entire stage load from death at the bottom of the canyon, a thousand feet below. The stage, turning a sharp corner, toppled over the grade and landed in the solitary pine. The horses were killed, but the passengers saved themselves by climbing down the tree.



No adequate appreciation of the life and spirit of the time can be had without some understanding of these Jehus of the passenger lines. Equally important, though less spectacular, were the freight-drivers, bull-whackers, mule-skinners, who manned the great Washoe freight wagons. The necessities of the situation bred men and mules to meet them. So in the story of the Comstock is found one more vivid example of the spirit and energy which has made America great. Always, in every emergency of our national life a man or men have arisen capable of coping with the emergency.

The freight lines across the Sierras required the services of men as honest and patient as they were physically hard and courageous. Promptly such men appeared. They were ranchers from the mountain valleys who saw opportunity for more profitable use of their horses and wagons on the long haul than in their fields; they were veterans of the Santa Fé and Salt Lake trails; they were men who had pioneered with the covered wagons across the continent, and had cracked their long whips through the valleys of California for a decade. They were a class by themselves, a definite factor in the pioneering of the West—not prospectors, not merchants, not gamblers, but self-respecting and self-sufficient men of business in their own right.

They were men who had to be able to wrestle and stow a two-hundred-pound bale of drygoods in a shifting load, who had to be able to handle ten to

twenty mules with a heavy wagon and two or three trailers on the mountain grades, who occasionally had to stand off highwaymen with their long rifles, whose honesty had to be accepted to the extent of thousands of dollars' worth of goods for which only a personal receipt was given. They were men revealing a strange mixture of qualities—as sentimental as they were practical under their weather-beaten exteriors. The oaths with which they encouraged or castigated their mules might even give way with astonishing innocence to devout prayers as they rolled in their blankets under the stars.

Living as they did in the open, walking for miles beside their teams through the mountains, working hard, sleeping soundly, frequently these men developed into philosophers of the simple life almost as worthy of a place in literature as in history. The story is told of one such freighter retired many years later to a job as station tender on the Goldfield-Bullfrog Road.

"In a way we was doin' things just as important as any of 'em. Ox teams and mules and freight wagons is just as important openin' up a new country as what gold is. And we was haulin' freight, and feedin' folks, and bringin' in tools and things to make life comfortable and all. And while some of the rich ones was soberin' up from their champagne wine jags, and feelin' mean, and figurin' out how they could open up another bonanza or bilk somebody out of a claim or

somethin', I was feelin' good out on the desert under the stars, and what you might call possessin' my soul in peace. . . .

"I ain't never been opposed to prayin', exactly; only there's ways and ways to pray. I figure you don't always have to get down on your knuckle bones and talk turkey to the Lord. If you're standin' out beside a freight wagon in the hills in the early mornin', watchin' the dark blue of the sky turn to pink and gold, and the blue of the desert turn to gray and silver, and you feel all sort of warm and worshippin' inside, I figure it's just as good as gettin' down on your knees and talkin' to Him about it."

The same man doubtless was as able to burn a mule's ear with his curses as he was to slit that ear with the lash of his long whip. It is recorded that the same man, Jed Alcott, "was a kind and generous man; especially when drunk."

In any event the men of that hard procession of freighters retain a vital significance in the development of the Comstock, and in the character of its life.

The freighters persisted in retaining their independence. No such great organizations as the passenger-carrying trade were formed among them. But the economic urge of supply and demand did tend to reveal the possibilities of profit in organization. The Ophir's steady buying of the neighboring properties which contested its rights and harassed production was another example to the same end.

The growing need for large quantities of timber to build the square sets necessary to continued development of the mines furnished another stimulus to organization. The pioneer sawmills established and abandoned by the Mormons of Washoe in the preceding decade had quickly stripped the limited timber from the nearest hills. They had built logging roads to more distant forests and employed scores of ox-teams to drag the logs within reach of their mill-ponds. Still the growing demand exceeded the supply, and companies were formed to supply this demand. Prominent among those pioneers of organization were Yerington, Bliss & Company, and a lumberman named Haines.

Business organization quickly developed business methods. The costly system of mountain logging roads could not satisfy the demand. The old mills could not prepare even the rough timber which was provided. The costs of handling were enormous. The demands of the mine superintendents for more and more timbers were a constant stimulus to the lumber companies.

Improved machinery followed in the mills, and box flumes supplanted many of the logging roads up the Sierra canyons to the forests. Haines, operating in Kingsbury Canyon, followed this improvement with the more economical and practical V-flume, which carried logs down the slopes and on trestles across canyons at a minimum of expense. The mines profited with the provision of more adequate timbers

at more reasonable costs, and the lumber companies proved the value of organization on a large scale. Within a few years the business was to develop into a monopoly of large proportions, but in the early days it was only a step in advance of the chaotic conditions which hampered all the development of the Comstock region.

But always through this chaos the clear force of economic law served in lieu of individual human leadership to expand the camp and improve the city. Virginia City grew despite its chaos, its waste and its errors. Installation of larger machinery at the mines called for construction of machine shops and foundries. The chemical processes used in reduction of ore in the mills required salt, copper sulphate, borax, alum, and oxide of manganese.

The veteran prospectors of the district eagerly answered the call. Prospectors are always available around a mining camp. They are a type as distinct from working miners as were the wagon freighters of that time from the railroad men of to-day. The true prospector is never a miner. He is a searcher for mines in the waste places of the earth. His only use for pick and shovel and dynamite is to do the assessment work necessary to open and hold his claim until it can be sold, leaving him free for new wanderings. But he frequents mining towns for recreation, for a grub-stake, for tips on new fields to explore, and for acquaintance with men whom he may interest in his next big strike, always just around the point of a hill.

He would almost as soon go to work in a haberdashery as to labor in the depths of a mine. He needs the stars and the sun overhead. He is an explorer and discoverer, looking upon the actual miner almost with contempt.

So the need of certain minerals and chemicals in the Comstock mills quickly turned prospectors to a search which might supply that need at a cost less than that of importation. Some copper ore was discovered on Walker River and mined to provide the sulphate for which the mills provided a market. Salt, alum and borax deposits were discovered and used. Business progressed and expanded.

With the growing importance of the mining stock exchange in San Francisco, there was need for better and quicker communication than that provided by the Pony Express. The first telegraph line from Virginia City to California had been stretched across the mountains from tree to tree and from rock to rock. Poles had been installed only where there was no natural point upon which to attach the wire. The result was what any intelligent man might have anticipated. The first mountain storm, swaying the trees, broke the wires in a score of places, and left it looped upon the ground. As fast as it could be repaired it was broken again. The service was suspended most of the time. The term "grape-vine telegraph," contemptuously used to denote a doubtful source of information, originated with this line. The trailing wires resembled the trailing wild grape-vines of Cali-

fornia, and were about equally useful for the transmission of messages. Within another year, however, the demand for adequate telegraph service promised sufficient profit so that the Overland Company stretched a substantial line upon poles, and operated it successfully.

Banking service also developed to meet the demand. In the first days of prosperity for the Ophir and a few other mines, while gold was still the chief revenue of the surface diggings, the miners entrusted their gold to the care of Lyman Jones, proprietor of one of the two canvas hotels in the camp. Jones kept the sacks, labeled with the names of their depositors, in a drygoods box under his bed, "without charge and without responsibility," as he was always careful to announce to depositors. Frequently there was as much as twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of gold in this depository, and so far as the records reveal there was never a loss.

As the deposits grew in value, and money began to come in from the silver bullion refined from the first ore shipped to San Francisco, this service proved as inadequate as it was unsafe. The Wells-Fargo Express Company, which had grown rich and respected through its service in all the early California mining towns, opened a Virginia City office, which gave banking service. The banking business grew and prospered with the education and prosperity of the town. Its possibilities soon were to bring into the camp a man who was to rule and to develop it with

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the ruthlessly efficient hand of a dictator. Such potential forces as were evident in the Comstock could not continue indefinitely without producing a leader for their control and exploitation.



## CHAPTER IX

### BIG BUSINESS TAKES A HAND

THE Territory of Nevada had been organized by act of Congress, March 2, 1861. A city government was operating. "The Bad Man from Bodie," later made famous by Mark Twain, had vanished. Cherokee Bob, perhaps the prototype of the gambler in Bret Harte's *Outcasts of Poker Flat*, had flashed and faded. "El Dorado Johnny" had groomed himself carefully "to look nice if he was used up," in an encounter with a man whom he sought to kill, and had accomplished the former purpose though he had failed in the latter. Fighting Sam Brown had succumbed to the buckshot of the peaceful Van Sickles. The "Big Chiefs" of the Comstock bad men had succumbed to the advance of civilization. Mines and mills were producing and traffic lines busy. Opportunity was open for the potential chiefs of big business.

First of such chiefs to appear was William Sharon, second king of the Comstock, if we are willing to dignify Comstock himself as the first monarch of that succession of dynasties. Sharon, physically, was an unimposing man. He was small, blue-eyed, with a jutting underlip and hair receding from a high forehead. Neat in dress to the point of foppishness, he

was not the man one might have expected to rule the rough citizens of the Comstock. But he did rule them, and how!

Born of a Quaker family in Ohio in 1821, Sharon had been educated for the law, and practised for a time in St. Louis. Dissatisfied, he had started a small retail business in Illinois. When the California rush started in 1849 he was living not far from the emigrant trail, and was drawn into the excitement quickly. He arrived in Sacramento that summer and started a store which was wrecked the following winter by floods from the Sacramento River. Then he removed to San Francisco and opened a real-estate office. This, his first successful business, netted him one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in three years.

But Sharon had the instinct of a gambler. The wild speculation in Comstock mines on the San Francisco exchange quickly absorbed his fortune. Foot-loose once more, with nothing but experience to show for his long years in California, Sharon obtained from William C. Ralston, of the Bank of California, a commission to transact some business for the bank in Virginia City. He executed this commission with such profit to the bank that he was appointed manager of a Virginia City branch. Ralston was not a man to condemn another for speculation. He himself was the greatest promoter and booster which the state of promoters and boosters has even yet produced. Sharon took up his duties with a free hand and the confidence of his employer. His rise was spectacular.

Partly through shrewd judgment, partly through sheer good luck, partly through unwavering confidence in the depth and value of the lode, partly through his ability to back this confidence with the money of the Bank of California, and partly through a ruthless willingness to seize and force a profit at any cost to others, Sharon succeeded.

His power was the power of money. The Bank of California was the leading financial institution on the Pacific Slope, and from the moment of his appointment Sharon wielded the strongest single influence in the Comstock district.

Many of the mines had exhausted the bonanzas which had marked their first years. The very slump in Comstock securities which had put Sharon into the district by wiping out his private fortune had provided a fertile field for his operation as a banker. Ophir, Mexican, Savage, Overman and other mines had looted their ore chambers of the last visible pound of bonanza ore. Gould & Curry and some others were still producing. Gould & Curry took out nine million dollars in bullion in 1863-64.

On October 31, 1864, President Lincoln had signed the proclamation announcing Nevada's admission to the Union as a state. James Nye, formerly territorial governor, and William M. Stewart, master of mining juries, had been elected to the United States Senate. A miners' union had been organized and won its first fight against reduction of wages from four dollars to three dollars and fifty cents a day. But the

Comstock as a whole was in its first serious depression.

Still, Virginia City was now in fact a city. It could not be destroyed in a season as Esmeralda and similar wildcat camps had been destroyed. There were many mills, each worth from a hundred thousand dollars upward. There was equipment at the mouth and in the depths of each of a score of mines which had been installed at a total cost of millions. There was a great investment in stores, business blocks, residences and real estate. There was a huge and profitable business in transportation, and another in lumbering. And most important of all, there was still bonanza ore visible in the Gould & Curry and a few other mines. The district was in a slump, but it could not so easily be destroyed.

Sharon had gained access to the mines and mills with capable experts and appraisers at his side to judge the value of securities offered his bank for loans. He had a clear idea of the possibilities of the Comstock lode as a whole. What matter if some of the mines were out of bonanza and into borrasca? They were still working, sinking shafts, running drifts. The fact that the money with which they continued these operations in most cases was now coming from assessments upon stockholders was comparatively unimportant. Indeed it seemed an advantage to Sharon. It made the mines and mills more eager to borrow money.

Local banks and capitalists were lending to merchants and mill owners at from three to five per cent.

a month. Even Sharon, accustomed to the fabulous rates, the criminal waste and the sudden fortunes of California in the 'fifties, gasped. And promptly he offered the Bank of California's money on the same security at a paltry two per cent. a month. The bank promptly got the business.

While the mines were producing ore and the mills reducing it to bullion at the high prices of that day they could easily pay even such rates of interest. But as the ore gave way to country rock, and mine after mine began hoisting waste instead of ore, the mill owners were soon in trouble. The ordinary life of the town was less disturbed. Pay-rolls in the mines continued even when they were shut off at the mills. Merchants still did business at high prices and with high profits. When a mining company's operating reserve was exhausted there were always stockholders who would pay assessments rather than allow their holdings to be sold out.

Sharon's interests were broad and his optimism high. He continued to lend the bank's money on the mills, and came down upon them like one of their own huge steam-driven stamps when the notes fell due. Mortgage after mortgage was foreclosed. It did not take long for interest at twenty-four per cent. a year to eat up an idle mill worth two hundred thousand dollars. The mill men were nearly all private owners and operators. They had no stockholders to assess. Seven of the largest and most modern mills fell into the hands of the Bank of California in the

first year of severe depression. Ralston became worried and visited Virginia City to investigate.

The bank director was shocked. He protested to Sharon that too much of the Bank of California's funds had been loaned on the mill and mining property. Even interest of two per cent. a month could not justify such extension of credit if the security proved insufficient, and at the moment it appeared decidedly insufficient. A two-hundred-thousand-dollar mill in the White Pine district was offered for five thousand dollars and found no buyer. A sixty-thousand-dollar mill nearer the lode was sold for three thousand dollars.

Their heavy stamping machinery, steam engines and other bulky equipment were virtually valueless without local demand for their service, and this demand was falling steadily. The cost of transportation by team back to California was greater than the junk value of the machinery. As most of this machinery had been designed especially for reduction of Comstock silver ore, there was no market for it in the mining towns of California. Besides, they had their own machinery.

The scores of Mexican arrastras which had lined Gold Canyon and the banks of the Carson River from Dayton to Genoa in 1860 had long since given way to stamp mills, amalgamation mills, and other modern improvements. Fortunes totaling several million dollars had been invested in these plants, and fortunes had been earned from them. Approximately

one hundred mills were operating in the district in the spring of 1863. Kelly's First Directory of Nevada listed eighty-two mills as operating in the preceding winter. And when Ralston visited the lode in 1864 less than four hundred tons of ore a day were being hoisted to employ a milling capacity of four times that amount.

The spirit of depression struck Ralston like a physical blow. The Bank of California had perhaps two million dollars of its money out on Comstock securities. The situation was extremely dangerous. But little could be done about it. If the Comstock failed the bank probably would fail with it. But if the Comstock revealed new bonanzas at greater depth, the mining property which had been foreclosed upon would mean profits beyond the wildest dreams.

Sharon assured Ralston that eventually such profits would be inevitable. The fact that the leading financial institution of the Pacific Slope had become practically a supply company for a group of questionable silver mines and mills on the Comstock lode appeared unfortunate, but nothing worse for the moment. The legal and ethical regulation of banks in 1864 was not what it is to-day. If the bank continued to support the further exploration of the lode, and opened the ore bodies which engineers and geologists assured Sharon were available at greater depths, its reward was certain. If it took its losses and withdrew, the Comstock almost certainly would fail, and the bank would fail with it.

In that vein Sharon, an optimist as all mining men must be, argued with Ralston and won his point. Ralston submitted somewhat doubtfully and returned to San Francisco. Sharon continued to lend the bank's money until three and one-half millions were out in the Comstock. Mortgages upon dozens of mining properties, timber lands, and other resources were in the vaults of the bank.

Before the year had passed, Yellow Jacket, Chollar-Potosi and several other mines increased their production sufficiently to justify Sharon's faith and policy in part. The bank survived. There were hard days still to come, but Sharon had been tried and toughened in the fire to withstand them. He was developing the power as well as the instincts and abilities of a monopolist. He recognized opportunity and was prepared to seize upon it.

Why not form a company to buy and operate the holdings obtained by the bank through foreclosure? This would let the bank out in safety, and give the owners of the proposed company all the vast contemplated profits instead of giving such profits to the bank's stockholders. These suggestions he offered to Ralston. The plan was no more ethical than that which built the first transcontinental railroad, or than some financial schemes of to-day's promoters, but it appeared legally sound at that time. After all, if the Comstock failed the bank would fail, and Ralston and his associates would fail. If the Comstock succeeded on anything like the scale forecast by Sharon



the bank would profit. But why distribute such immense profit among stockholders when it might be distributed among officials? In either case the bank's risk would be no greater.

Sharon won that argument too. The famous Union Mill and Mining Company was organized with William Sharon, W. C. Ralston, D. O. Mills, Alvinza Hayward and a few others in control. Gradually it took over the mills and other properties upon which the bank had foreclosed. Organization and leadership at last were apparent upon the Comstock. It was to be hated and cursed for years as a grinding vicious monopoly, but it was to direct the progress of the district with a shrewd and ruthless profit-seeking efficiency without which the big bonanza might not have been developed for decades.

In the meantime, however, another force had been developing in the district. At first it was only the force of a dream, but the desire to make dreams come true is a feature of American character which has built the nation. This dream was conceived in the ambitious mind of Adolph Sutro, then as insignificant a member of the community as were Mackay, Fair, and the few others who eventually were to wrest power, wealth and fame from the desert mountains.

Adolph Sutro had come to the Comstock with the first rush across the Sierras from San Francisco in the early spring of 1860. He was then thirty years old.

Sutro was a powerfully built young man, a little above medium height, broad-shouldered and mus-

cular. His forehead was high, his eyes reflective and calculating, his nose and chin aggressive. Energy, ambition and an indomitable will were apparent in face, figure and every movement.

His first business venture in the Comstock had been in a small amalgamation mill at Dayton. There he had instituted an improved process, worked out in a laboratory in San Francisco, and had taken a profit of ten thousand dollars a month from a contract with one of the leading mines until his mill had burned.

Riding on horseback between his mill in Dayton and the mines of Virginia City, Sutro had become thoroughly familiar with the topography and the surface geology of the entire Comstock district. From early boyhood he had been an omnivorous reader with a retentive mind. Throughout his years in California he had studied mines, mining and metallurgy. He knew something about the subject. Also he was a practical business man. He recognized and condemned the waste consequent upon the chaotic methods of mining and milling in the Comstock.

The first mines on the lode had simply followed the scattered veins downward into the side of Mount Davidson, looting the ore as fast as it was uncovered, and taking out country rock at an expense equal to that of raising the ore. There was no comprehensive engineering, no plan, no system. Only when the shafts grew too deep to raise the buckets by hand or mule-power were the first steam engines installed. Only when the water which was being constantly

encountered in the depths appeared in such quantities as to flood out the miners, were steam pumps installed. Only when thousand-dollar or hundred-dollar ore gave place to fifty-dollar ore were the mill processes improved to work the cheaper product at a profit to both mine and mill.

Sutro knew these facts. They irked his thrifty and efficient soul. Millions were being thrown away. Evidence of the waste was all about him. Something ought to be done about it. But what? Why hoist ore and waste rock if it could be run out of the mines by gravity through a tunnel? Why pump water hundreds of feet up through a shaft and waste it on the desert hillside if it could also be drained out through a tunnel and concentrated for irrigation? Why pay for equipment and maintain machinery to ventilate the depths of the mines if fresh air could be circulated naturally? The expensive and wasteful methods were absurd. A tunnel would eliminate them all. So Sutro, riding up the slopes from Dayton to Virginia City, conceived the tunnel which was to tear the Comstock apart, literally and figuratively.

His many journeys over the hills between Virginia City and the Carson Valley had revealed to his inspired vision a possible route for such a tunnel. His confidence in the depth and rich future of the Comstock lode was at least equal to that of William Sharon. In no temporary state of depression such as that which had alarmed Ralston and given Sharon his opportunity did Sutro's faith waver.

Drive this tunnel from a point on the slope above the Carson River, four miles into the mountain and it will cut the lode at a depth of two thousand feet below the surface of the mines, he said to himself. That will prove conclusively and at lower cost than driving down from above, that the ore bodies extend to depths below the ability of man to work. The greatest geologists of the world are agreed that the Comstock is a true fissure vein. That means that its ore bodies extend downward many thousands of feet.

Drive this tunnel and we will not only save the fortunes which are being used in hoisting rock and pumping water and providing artificial ventilation, but we will increase by two thousand feet the depth to which the lode eventually can be worked. The picture was as clear to his mind as if he stood at the face of the tunnel and watched the cars of ore and the streams of water running outward to the Carson slopes.

His mill had burned. His contract with Gould & Curry had expired. Depression was in the air. Innumerable mills were idle. He was free to act. And he did act. He went straightway to the Nevada legislature and asked for a franchise for the tunnel which he proposed to build. The fact that his private capital was approximately one hundred thousand dollars, and that even the first crude estimates of the tunnel's cost exceeded two million dollars, he ignored.

He was able to fire the legislators, many of whom were practical miners, with his own enthusiasm. He

would be able as easily to inspire capital with equal enthusiasm, he felt. The franchise was granted, "authorizing A. Sutro and his associates to construct a Mining and Draining Tunnel," through a specified right of way, beginning one year after April 4, 1865, and to be finished in eight years.

The Sutro Tunnel Company was organized immediately with William M. Stewart, D. E. Avery, Louis Janin, Jr., H. K. Mitchell and A. Sutro as trustees and directors.

The hero or the villain of the great Comstock melodrama, depending upon the point of view, had appeared. William Sharon and the Bank of California syndicate, also hero or villain as the case might be, had already taken the first steps toward control.

The human forces of the Comstock were organizing for war, though at the moment none recognized the fact.

## CHAPTER X

### MONOPOLY AND PROMOTION

IT DID not take long for the Union Mill and Mining Company, officered by Sharon, Ralston, D. O. Mills and kindred spirits, financed by the Bank of California, and stimulated by wealth and ambition, to seize control of most of the Comstock. The syndicate started with seven mills to which the bank had obtained title by foreclosure, and this while there was not enough ore coming out of the mines to keep one-fourth of the mills of the district busy.

Sharon wielded the whip of the bank's financial power without mercy. "Give our mills your business or we shut down on your credit." It was a successful ultimatum. As fast as their contracts with independent mills expired the mines bowed to the lash. The syndicate's mills ran night and day, while scores of independents rusted in idleness. Within two years the syndicate had taken title to seventeen mills. They were capable of crushing and refining every pound of ore being produced on the Comstock, and they did handle most of it.

Their prices were still high. The syndicate was almost literally a mint, regardless of the fact that many of the mines continued in *borrasca*. There

were always enough producing to keep the wagons of the ore freighters piled high with food for the jaws of the syndicate's great stamp batteries, with consequent financial nourishment for the syndicate itself.

What matter that a dozen mines were living on assessments wrung from their scattered stockholders? They were still sinking their shafts, running their drifts and crosscuts, exploring the lode at greater and greater depths. What matter that the money for their pay-rolls and supplies was coming from speculating bank clerks in New York, widows in Philadelphia, fur dealers in St. Louis, waiters in San Francisco, washerwomen in Placerville? It was coming to the extent of a vast total. Ten mines in the history of the Comstock sunk in their exploration work a total of \$17,000,000 without ever paying a single cent in dividends. The amounts ranged from \$1,030,000 in the Utah to \$3,230,000 in the Justice.

But this money was just as good for local business in Virginia City and the neighboring Gold Hill as if it had come from the ground beneath their feet. The city thrived. Schools, churches, clubs and business blocks continued to spring from the desert mountain-side, while thousands of men delved and blasted in the earth below.

Sharon and his associates<sup>d</sup> could afford to look with satisfaction upon this situation. All the work in all these unproductive mines was helping to develop and reveal the character of the lode, producing valuable

information when they did not produce ore, and without cost to the monopolists. And many of those which never produced a dividend did produce bullion. Overman, for instance, took out \$3,250,000 worth of silver. Very likely this was the reason it was able to obtain \$3,162,800 in assessments on its stockholders to continue its work between the scattered ore bodies within its ground. Others, notably the Yellow Jacket and the Sierra Nevada, worked much richer ground, produced millions in silver and actually alternated assessments with dividends. The fact that the former collected assessments of \$2,454,000 and the latter \$3,747,500 was incidental to the progress of the town. The figures are cited merely to indicate the scale upon which the business of the district was conducted.

It was a veritable paradise for promoters. The wildest schemes imaginable were suggested and considered in good faith. Outstanding among such schemes, imposing an impossible burden upon present-day credulity, was one project for the construction of a "sunlight tunnel." It was an idea so obviously absurd that the very fact of its apparently serious consideration warrants giving it space here as an illustration of the credulous character of the Virginia City of that day. *The Territorial Enterprise* actually devoted a column of its limited news space to announcement of this weird promotional plan to extend the sunlight hours of the town.

The plan was to build a huge tunnel, two and one-



fourth miles long, through the top of Mount Davidson, to carry sunlight into the town after the sun disappeared behind the peak, leaving the town in shadow after three o'clock in the afternoon.

"By an ingeniously arranged system of mirrors—some hundreds of mirrors will be used—the rays of the sun will be caught up and conveyed through the tunnel to any desired point at will," *The Enterprise* explained. Small mirrors were to collect the sun's rays on the western side of the mountain, send them to a grand reflector, and so through the mountain to be distributed by small reflectors at the city end. All of the mirrors were to be regulated by clockwork to follow exactly the movement of the sun. "One mirror of the largest size used in distribution will, it is calculated, shed a warm and glowing light over a sidewalk for the length of a block."

But the Virginia City imagination did not stop there. The reflected rays were not only to extend the daylight hours in the camp but were to be concentrated to melt and dry out the snow and mud of winter, "in fact boil it down at once."

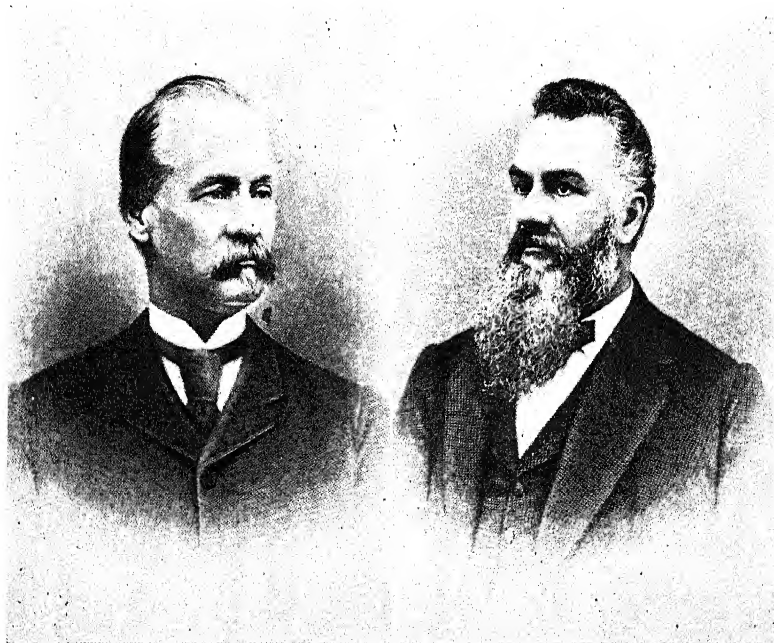
The announcement stated that the company already had an agent in New York who "writes that men of capital there are eagerly awaiting the issue of the stock, looking upon the project as one of the most feasible and easily comprehended in all its details of any yet broached."

Had Mark Twain still been a member of *The Enterprise* staff, probably the reaction to that story



*Courtesy Bancroft Library.*

JAMES C. FLOOD



*Courtesy Bancroft Library.*

WILLIAM SHARON

*Courtesy Bancroft Library.*

JAMES G. FAIR



would have been a roar of hilarity throughout the district. But Mark Twain and his well-known reputation for crude humor and practical jokes had disappeared from the Comstock long since, and the article was generally accepted in good faith. The idea received much favorable consideration and comment, but there were more pressing needs and more practical promoters in the community.

Sharon had engineered his monopoly into a strong technical position. If the mines produced, the mill company worked the bulk of their ore. If the mines did not produce, they assessed their stockholders and continued to support the general business of the community, including Sharon's timber business. Every time a new body of ore was opened in an assessment mine the stock boomed on the San Francisco market. If the amount of ore was large and the grade high, the mill company took a large profit in the working. If the new ore body was limited and poor, the speculative stock buyers, not the monopoly, stood the loss.

Sharon had his representatives in almost every shaft in the district. The method of his operation was revealed later in sworn testimony before the House Committee on Mines and Mining, in Washington. Adolph Sutro was examining Wesley Newcomb, member of the government's committee which had been investigating the situation on the lode.

Mr. Sutro.—Professor, I want to ask you whether, from your observation, those mines are

worked legitimately for mining purposes or whether they are worked for stock-jobbing purposes?

A.—I think when they strike a bonanza they are worked for mining purposes. But when they do not, they work them in the stock board in San Francisco.

Q.—Do you know of any instance where they had a body of ore they had discovered, where they didn't let the public know? Did you ever hear of any such instance?

A.—They struck in the Belcher while we were there.

Q.—Was it known the day they struck it? Did the public generally get that information at once?

A.—We were examining these mills at the time at some distance off, and a party came riding on horseback with a very nice specimen, and handed a note to the president of the mill company.

Q.—Who was he?

A.—He was Mr. Sharon.

Q.—He was with you, was he?

A.—Well, we were with him. He was taking us out in his carriage, very kindly, to show us the mill property, and we saw that this was a matter of considerable importance to him. We rather urged him to turn back, thinking that he might be required at his office. He did so, and telegraphed to San Francisco for the purchase of stock

of the Belcher Company. . . . He told me afterward that he had secured control of the mine.

Probably Sharon and his syndicate made millions from that one deal. At the time of the incident mentioned Belcher stock was selling at about \$6.00 a share. Three months later it was up to \$1,525. The mine was always one of the most profitable as well as one of the most speculative on the lode, its stock ranging back and forth between \$.25 cents and \$1,525 a share. It paid a total of \$16,000,000 in dividends. Quite evidently William Sharon and his monopoly were in a position to make money out of their control of Comstock activities.

Viewed from a strictly pragmatic standpoint they deserved the reward. Unquestionably Sharon's shrewd business ability, coupled with ruthlessness and an abiding faith in the riches of the lode was the greatest single human factor in the development of the district to the point where Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien could carry it on to its most sensational heights. The fact that he was cordially hated and feared by all the independents of the district, and that a certain poetic justice eventually struck his monopoly, merely adds to the melodrama of the big bonanza.

At the moment he seemed all-powerful. He used his power shrewdly and constructively in many matters. The fact that he made millions for himself and his associates out of the blood and sweat of lesser men can not detract from the fact that he made the Com-

stock great. He applied business methods far in advance of his time to the problems which pressed upon every side. He cut down much of the wasteful extravagance of the mines which he controlled directly and indirectly. He cut down the attendant waste in the mills, or at least diverted it to the pockets of the syndicate instead of allowing it to be thrown away. Under his direction the average milling costs of the district were reduced from the fifty dollars which was paid gladly on the first ore locally refined, to an average of about fourteen dollars a ton. The direct result, of course, was that vast quantities of ore which otherwise would have been discarded, could be worked with profit both to mines and mills. It was constructive work. However great the syndicate's profit, and however arbitrary the monopoly's rule, the net results were beneficial to the district.

Analyzing the business situation after he had settled thoroughly into the life of Virginia City, Sharon was quick to see that tremendous sums were being expended in wagon freights from the mines to the mills along the Carson River. Why pay independent bull-whackers and mule-skinners high rates for hauling ore to the mills in such inefficient manner? Why should not his syndicate build a railroad, and not only pay the freight to themselves but stimulate business generally with lower freight rates on all commodities? The imminent completion of the first trans-continental railroad, which would give contact by rail with San Francisco by way of Reno, only a few

miles north of the Comstock, was making the country railroad-minded. Sharon saw opportunity for controlling not only local ore freights but for supplanting the entire wagon freight business with a modern transportation system under his own control. He called in J. E. James, superintendent of the Sierra Nevada Company, the man believed to be the best engineer in the district.

"James, can you run a railroad from Virginia City to the Carson River?"

"Yes."

"Do it at once."

That was the sort of conference in which Sharon delighted. There was never any long-winded debate with him. He approached each problem with an open mind, obtained all possible information bearing upon it, and then asked his vital questions and made his decisions. In this case he had already calculated the savings and consequent profit possible through the substitution of railroad for wagon-trains. He had even made tentative plans for financing the road, without using his own or his associates' money. In that he was peculiarly a pioneer of the big business of to-day, just as the whole Bank of California monopoly was an exact prototype of innumerable gigantic trusts to come.

Numerous visionaries on the Comstock previously had dreamed of a railroad to supplant the freight teams hauling ore to the mills on the Carson River, and returning with wood and other supplies for the



mines and city. Some of these had even applied for franchises, and obtained them from the Nevada legislature. Some had surveyed rights of way. All had estimated the profits. None, however, had possessed the necessary energy, executive ability or funds to make their dreams come true.

Sharon had all these essential qualifications. Also he had more insistent reasons for acting. The railroad, especially if financed with public funds and left under his control as he planned, would not only net his monopoly a tremendous profit but would tighten its hold upon the entire district. At the moment it appeared even necessary, to save the Bank of California. The bullion production of the lode had fallen from a million and a half a month in 1864 when Sharon assumed control of the bank in Virginia City to hardly more than half a million a month when he decided to build the railroad. He knew that the reduction in mining and milling expenses which would be made possible through the railroad might easily mean the difference between abandoning the lode and continuing to work it as it could be worked at reduced costs.

Some of the earlier railroad dreamers had prepared figures. The estimated cost was \$1,105,743. The estimated gross annual revenue was \$1,368,320. The net profits had been estimated at sixty per cent. of gross revenue. It was an alluring prospect for such a man as Sharon, especially when it promised safety instead of destruction for all the syndicate's great in-

vestments in the district. All this he knew when he spoke to James. All he needed was the engineer's assurance that the road could be built.

The very next day a dozen groups of surveyors were in the field. But before the first transit was set up Sharon had organized the Virginia, Carson and Truckee Railroad Company, with virtually the same directorate as that of the Union Mill and Mining Company. Within the single month required to complete the survey he had bought out the rights of the various moribund companies which had earlier applied for charters. To play safe he had also secured a new charter from the Nevada legislature. Revealing his politico-financeering ability still more profitably, he had obtained legislative authority for an issue of five hundred thousand dollars' worth of bonds by Storey and Ormsby Counties as a free gift to the contemplated road.

The chief engineer reported that facilities afforded by the Truckee River would doubtless create an immense business in the transportation of low-grade ore for reduction there, and that rock assaying as low as twelve dollars a ton could be worked with profit to the mines, mills and railroad. This promised new life to the Comstock. Sharon promptly carried the information to the independent mines and signed them up for subscriptions to the railroad totaling seven hundred thousand dollars. The financing of the road was assured without the expenditure of one nickel by the Sharon group.

Five hundred thousand dollars as a free gift from the county governments and seven hundred thousand dollars subscribed by the mines assured completion, while Sharon's shrewd methods of organization assured him control. As soon as the survey was finished, seven hundred and fifty graders were at work on the right of way. In another month twelve hundred men were working from thirty-eight camps along the twenty-one-mile route between Virginia and Carson City. Other gangs were cutting ties in the Sierras. Rails had been ordered from England. By the time the rails arrived the grading had been virtually completed, and ties scattered over its entire length. Eight months after Sharon had given James the order, "do it at once," the railroad was in operation from Carson City to Virginia City.

It was a monumental work, as interesting for its engineering accomplishments as it was illustrative of the tremendous energy which moved the Comstock. In the first thirteen miles of road below Virginia City there was a drop of sixteen hundred feet, and curves which totaled seventeen complete circles. The cost, including equipment, was \$1,750,000. Sharon had taken \$1,200,000 of this from the public, and made them like it. Why not?

Wood was the only fuel of the district. Mills were consuming 223 cords daily, mines 72 cords, and domestic users 60 cords, at prices ranging from \$14.00 to \$17.00 a cord. The district was using 23,830,000 board feet of lumber annually, of which 17,910,000

feet were going into the mines for timbering. The new road promised to cut the price from \$29.00 to \$21.00 per thousand feet. The annual freight costs on 30,000 tons of merchandise coming into the district by wagon was \$1,800,000. The promised connection of the new road with the recently completed transcontinental line at Reno or Truckee would cut this cost \$90,000. The Comstock was assured that the total savings conferred upon it by the new railroad would be at least \$895,000 a year. Of course they liked it.

So Sharon salved the public. For the business men who had signed up for \$700,000 and the taxpayers who were paying for the \$500,000 bond gift, he had the more specious argument that the road would bring incalculable profit to the district by permitting the refinement of twelve-dollar ore. This would, he explained and demonstrated, allow reopening of numerous closed mines, and increase the annual bullion production of the lode by \$2,500,000 to \$5,000,000.

Sharon's Bank of California syndicate reaped huge profits. Incidentally, it tided the Comstock district over the leanest years it had suffered since 1865. Leadership had come to the Comstock in the time of its peril, and was making itself felt with a vengeance. Sharon believed the laborer to be worthy of his hire.

No sooner had the syndicate perfected its monopolistic control of the mills and transportation than Sharon's acquisitive abilities turned to new fields. Two other main items of supply were essential to the

life and progress of the region. These were wood and water.

The amount of timber going into the mines at increased depths was staggering. Millions upon millions of board feet of timber sawed into lengths for square-sets were being dumped at the shaft-houses, lowered into the mines and buried for ever to brace shafts, drifts and stopes against the crumbling mountain. The average life of these timbers in the steaming, dripping, sagging depths of the lode was two years. Even mines which were doing comparatively little work were forced to keep timber crews employed constantly.

The railroad had a monopoly upon the transportation of this vast amount of timber. Why shouldn't it take the additional profit from production? With Sharon, to think was to act. Immediately he began to buy up or foreclose mortgages upon timber lands, sawmills and flumes on the slopes of the Sierras. As fast as the bank foreclosed mortgages, title was purchased by the subsidiary syndicate. When there was no mortgage, Sharon offered owners shares in the monopoly, or even excellent cash prices when he could get the property in no other way. Soon the syndicate was taking new profits from the sale of timber and cord wood to mines, mills and individuals; taking still more profits from the transportation of these supplies, and still more by adding these costs and keeping up its milling rates proportionately.

It was a sweet arrangement for the bankers. Just

how sweet was indicated later in the lavish personal expenditures of William Sharon. It is still indicated to-day in the fame of such fortunes as that of the late philanthropic and altruistic D. O. Mills.

Transportation, milling and timber supply having been effectively monopolized, the final necessity, water, held Sharon's attention. Twenty-four mills, of which the syndicate owned seventeen, were paying the Virginia and Gold Hill Water Company \$5,410 a month for water. It irked Sharon to feel that he was not getting that money. But the water problem had been one of the most difficult in Virginia City ever since Henry Comstock had used his alleged title in a feeble hillside spring to extort an interest in the original Ophir diggings from O'Riley and McLaughlin. The pioneer city had managed with difficulty on the supply available from springs and wells. But when such water was available it was of poor and even dangerous quality, impregnated with alkali, arsenic and other chemicals.

As each dry summer advanced water became more and more scarce and dangerous. That which was pumped from the mines was so foul as to be utterly useless. As the underground workings extended, honeycombing the earth beneath the town, frequently the bottom would literally drop out of the wells. Dan DeQuille describes a typical incident in his *History of the Big Bonanza*.

"A lady resident of the town one day went to a

well in her door-yard to draw some water. Being in haste, she let the bucket go down from the windlass 'by the run,' and the instant it struck the water, out dropped the whole bottom of the well. Every drop of water instantly disappeared and nought was seen where it had been but a black yawning chasm in which hung and dangled the bucket. Amazed almost beyond the power of speech, the lady for a time stood and gazed into the bottomless well, then rushed to the house. She had considered the matter and comprehended it.

" 'What did I tell you?' she cried, addressing her rather easy-going husband. 'I knew that the men who dug that well were taking no pains with their work!'

" 'What is the matter now?' said the husband.

" 'Matter? Matter enough! The bottom has dropped out of the well!'

" 'Bottom dropped out of the well?' exclaimed the husband, beginning to become interested.

" 'Yes; the bottom has dropped out of the well, and I am not at all surprised. I am not one bit astonished. I knew when I saw the men putting the bottom in that well that it would never be of any account.'

"The cause of the accident was simple enough. The well had been dug in the line of a tunnel advancing from a distant point below. The miners, all unconscious of the presence of the well, had drifted under it, and at no great distance from its bottom.

Being without adequate support the bottom must have fallen out soon of its own accord, but the sudden jar of the bucket on the surface of the water undoubtedly precipitated the event."

Not all the wells of Virginia City had come to so sudden and spectacular an end in the early years of the town, but nearly all had gradually allowed their water to seep away into the growing labyrinth of underground workings. The few springs in the district went the same way. Water rights became almost as valuable as mining claims. Hundreds of men prospected the surrounding hills and canyons for water. Small canyons were dammed to store the melting of the winter snows. Old shafts were utilized as reservoirs. Still the water was inadequate and of poor quality. The Virginia and Gold Hill Water Company controlled the larger part of the local supply, and sold it at high rates, but the future was dark. There was too little pure water for domestic use and too much poisonous seepage flooding the mines.

The company, however, was independent. It had a prosperous small monopoly of its own. Sharon was unable at the moment to add the water supply to his milling, transportation, timber and finance monopolies. Although he was recognized as the unquestioned dictator of the Comstock, he was bitterly hated and distrusted by numerous important men in the region. The situation was aptly described in a paragraph which appeared in *The Enterprise*: "Bejabers!



The whole of Virginia is comprised in two blocks, and them two blocks consist of one corner, and that corner is the Bank of California."

Still those who were free of debt or otherwise independent of the Bank of California, and who had the courage of their convictions, opposed Sharon openly. Among them was Adolph Sutro.

Sutro had stepped afoul of the syndicate early in his work of promoting the tunnel which he believed would solve all the Comstock's problems of drainage, ventilation, cheaper mining and cheaper transportation. At first he had been diplomatic and conciliatory, but soon, believing himself tricked and betrayed by the greed and power of the bank ring, he had declared war.

That war was to be the most dramatic human feature in the history of the Comstock lode. At first it appeared to be a feeble David against an almost omnipotent Goliath.

## CHAPTER XI

### A WAR DEVELOPS

ADOLPH SUTRO's first franchise and right of way for his proposed tunnel to drain and develop the Comstock lode had been obtained from the Nevada legislature at about the time William Sharon assumed management of the Bank of California's business in Virginia City. At that time each man apparently enjoyed the respect of the other. Sutro had been on good terms with W. C. Ralston, Sharon's superior officer, in San Francisco. He started his tunnel propaganda in Virginia City on good terms with Sharon. He had with him as a director Senator William M. Stewart, then the most influential man in the state.

But he lacked money. In order to get it he must sell stock in his promotion. To sell stock in a district so dominated by the Bank of California it was necessary to obtain the bank's endorsement of the project. Sutro obtained such an endorsement, signed by Sharon, Ralston, and scores of prominent men in the district, including the superintendents of all the leading mines.

Then he canvassed the mines and obtained contracts from nineteen in which they agreed to pay the Sutro Tunnel Company two dollars per ton for

all ore extracted after the tunnel had drained the mines. The drainage and ventilation, of incalculable benefit, were to be free. In return for this pledged royalty the company was bound to start work by August 1, 1867, with three million dollars subscribed capital, and spend at least four hundred thousand dollars annually in driving the tunnel.

But the same depression which gave Sharon his opportunity to monopolize control of the Comstock hampered Sutro's ability to raise money. He could sell comparatively little stock in the West, where the Comstock's depression was felt most seriously. He decided to interest eastern capital. To do so it was necessary to have more endorsements and more publicity. Sutro shrewdly used the very depression which was blocking his work to excite the interest of the press of the Pacific Coast, explaining that only through the tunnel could the Comstock be restored to full productivity and consequent stimulation of business. Every newspaper of any importance in California and Nevada carried news and editorial comment urging construction of the tunnel.

Sutro drew up a petition to Congress urging government aid for the tunnel as a public necessity for the stimulation of mining in the West. The memorial was signed by thousands. It was further supported by individual scientific and economic endorsements from a score of economists, professors and mining engineers of international reputation. To avoid any late difficulty through possible questioning of the Ne-

vada franchise through federal land, he drew up a bill which was presented by Senator Stewart and passed by Congress, confirming not only his franchise and right of way but giving additional privileges and, most important of all, making the titles of all mining companies thereafter registered dependent upon their adherence to the tunnel contract.

Going to New York to interest capital, Sutro presented letters signed by Ralston, which gave him audience with such men as Commodore Vanderbilt and William B. Astor. They were interested but cautious. If it is as good as you say, they told him, you should be able to raise money at home. Show us five hundred thousand dollars' worth of subscriptions from Comstockers and Californians and we will raise the rest. He returned to Virginia City and began to obtain subscriptions. But they were not sufficient. His time limit was expiring. He induced the mining companies which had signed contracts to extend his time for starting work by one year. Then he turned to the Nevada legislature once more for additional support and induced it to adopt resolutions addressed to Congress calling for a federal subsidy for the tunnel on the ground that it would so far stimulate the production of bullion as more than to pay the national debt incurred in the Civil War, just ended. Backed with this official memorial, he went again to Washington and succeeded in having the House Committee on Mines and Mining recommend to Congress a loan of five million dollars for the tunnel company.

"That was the fatal step which caused the envy and avariciousness of some of the leading men on the Comstock, at the head of whom was William Sharon," said Sutro some time later. "He argued with his friends, and especially with William C. Ralston, who had been my particular friend, that this was a fine chance of getting a large sum of money out of Uncle Sam. He said that if I could be put out of the way, they could get five or ten millions from Congress."

But even before he recognized and branded that error, Sutro had made another, and perhaps more serious mistake. Continuing his sales promotion of tunnel stock, he developed the added argument that by completing the tunnel, and providing a cheap and easy way of transportation of ore from the two-thousand-foot level to the tunnel's mouth above the Carson River, the company could refine the ore at less than half the milling costs set by the monopoly's mills.

There indeed he was striking at the heart of the monopoly. If he could cut the milling costs in half, all the seventeen mills owned by the Sharon ring would be worthless, the syndicate would be ruined, and Sutro would supplant Sharon as dictator of the Comstock. The promoter discovered the extent of that error when next he visited the offices of the Bank of California in New York on his first trip to Europe in search of funds for the promotion.

"I found a placard posted up, saying that the Savage Company had repudiated its subscription to the tunnel company," Sutro explained later. "I was as-

tonished to find in a banking office in New York a placard like that. Everybody from the Pacific Coast would come in and read it, and would think I had committed some crime, or had been guilty of some rascality. They wanted to ruin me in New York so I could get no money there."

That conclusion was partly true. The Bank of California ring by this time had turned definitely against Sutro. The battle-lines were drawn. Sharon had decided to crush the pretender to his throne. But it was not only to crush Sutro but to increase the monopoly's immediate power and income that the Savage mine's subscription to tunnel stock had been repudiated. Sharon had decided to build his railroad. He could kill two birds with one stone—handicap the threatening tunnel competition and assist the railroad financing—by bringing pressure on the mining companies to cancel their tunnel subscriptions and turn the funds to the railroad. Much of the seven hundred thousand dollars obtained from the mining companies to help Sharon build the railroad had previously been pledged to the tunnel.

And where Sharon could not thus obtain a transfer of the subscription from the tunnel to the railroad, he could operate in other ways to destroy Sutro. Thus at the annual election of the Crown Point Mine he succeeded in turning out the president and superintendent and installing his own agents who promptly repudiated that company's seventy-five-thousand-dollar subscription to the tunnel. The paper capital

of one million dollars obtained by Sutro withered in his hands to a few thousands subscribed by personal friends.

The power of Sharon, of the Bank of California, and of the monopoly, proved itself with a few devastating blows. Even the respected Senator Stewart took his orders and resigned from the directorate of the tunnel company. Lesser persons followed his lead.

"Nearly all the persons who had stood by me now deserted me," said Sutro years later. "They shunned me as if I had an infectious disease. Every miserable cur and hireling of that bank turned the cold shoulder on me. But the ring had got hold of the wrong man. I was not so easily to be disposed of. When I found that these traitors, after having signed contracts, after having urged and helped me to expend time and my friends' money, after having induced me to labor almost day and night for several years, which I did with zeal and enthusiasm—I say when I found that they were determined to rob me of my labors, I made a sacred vow that I would carry out this work if I had to devote the remainder of my life to it, and would defend my rights as long as the breath of life was in me."

So Sutro invaded Europe in search of funds. He obtained audiences with the leading bankers of France, Germany and England. But there also he failed, and returned to America. Private financing appeared impossible. The Bank of California's opposition was too powerful. He centered his efforts in

Washington, and actually succeeded in inducing the Committee on Mines and Mining to report favorably a bill to advance five million dollars of federal funds for construction of the tunnel. But again Congress adjourned before the bill came to a vote, and Sutro returned to the Comstock, almost despairing.

There he found general conditions almost as depressed as he was himself. The bank syndicate was virtually the only organization in the district that was making any money. The workings had reached a depth where the floods of water, the intense heat, and the reduced efficiency of the miners were raising overhead costs to a point where even the good ore bodies available were hardly paying expenses. The prospects were dark for Sutro, and not too brilliant even for the bank syndicate.

It was the spring of 1869, perhaps the most critical period in the history of the Comstock lode. Sharon was promoting the new railroad, and promising to rehabilitate the mines by reducing transportation and milling costs. Sutro was as yet only promising even greater benefits from the proposed tunnel. The lode was at its lowest point of production. Officials and miners were equally depressed. It was whispered that the Comstock had paid its last dividend.

The men in the depths were working under agonizing conditions. Some went insane amid the fumes of arsenic, antimony and sulphur which arose in an overpowering stench from the floods of hot water in every deep shaft and crosscut. Others succumbed to heart



troubles. The blowers installed for ventilation of the stopes and headings could make little impression upon the foul atmosphere. Temperatures arose to one hundred and twenty degrees in many parts of the labyrinth. Vast quantities of ice were used to help the men and the mules survive the heat of the depths. "Even with this help," said *The Enterprise*, "four picked men in some stopes have found themselves unable to do the work of one man in a cool drift."

Still Sutro and Sharon, each bitterly opposed to the efforts of the other, maintained an equally amazing confidence and optimism in the future of the lode. Each persisted in his own way, despite all opposition and disappointment.

Then circumstances conspired for a day to give Sutro a new footing for his next blow at the overpowering monopoly. For five years he had been merely a potential menace. Suddenly he developed into an active one.

On April 7, 1869, fire broke out in the Yellow Jacket mine, which connected underground with the Crown Point on one side and the Kentucky on the other. The blaze spread quickly to the timbers in the adjoining workings. There were literally millions of feet of these timbers underground. All the main shafts were down to a depth of one thousand feet or more. At every one-hundred-foot stage of this depth drifts and crosscuts had been run. In every foot of shaft and drift timbers stood thickly. In the great

ore chambers which had been stoped out these timbers had been piled one upon the other in the square-set method, sometimes to a height of two hundred feet. Plank floors had been laid every six feet up through these great frame structures. Thus millions of feet of lumber were ready for the conflagration.

No one knew the extent of the danger more clearly than the miners and their families. The alarm calling the Virginia City and Gold Hill fire apparatus had hardly gone out when frenzied women and children began to flock to the mouth of the Yellow Jacket, Crown Point and Kentuck shafts. Smoke and stifling gas were pouring out. As fast as the hoisting machinery could run, the cages were dropped to the various levels and jerked upward to the surface. But few men were found aboard them, and in most instances those few were unconscious from their ride upward through the fumes.

The first man out told a harrowing story of the situation below. In the Crown Point so many men crowded upon the first cage, designed to carry a maximum of sixteen, that the shift boss was afraid to give the signal to hoist. It would have been death to a dozen attempting to cling to the cage. For five minutes it stood in the inferno with men battling in frenzy for places before the hoisting bell was sounded. As the cage started upward several of the men left behind threw themselves to death in the shaft in their panic.

Other men, running wildly through the drifts toward the shafts and hope of rescue, miscalculated their distance in the darkness and plunged down to death. Others were suffocated without ever a chance to reach the cages. All attempts to enter the mines in the first two hours of the fire were useless. Any such effort would have been suicide. For these hours the scenes around the shaft-houses of the three mines were heart-rending. Wives and children who knew their men were trapped in the depths from which these clouds of smoke and gas billowed, had to be held back by force. The officials could do nothing after the cages had been lowered and raised two or three times.

There had been small fires in the mines before, but nothing to compare with this. In the smaller fires the method of fighting had been to block off the drift or stope involved, and pump the closed area full of steam. This method could not be applied to the whole mine at once. It would have been certain death to the men below. There was nothing to do but wait—futile, helpless, agonized.

After two hours of such waiting, while practically the whole population of Virginia City and Gold Hill crowded around the shaft-houses of the burning mines, the smoke suddenly ceased to roll from the mouth of the Kentuck. Some unexplained force of the fire below evidently had reversed the draft. The smoke and gas were going down instead of up. Volunteers immediately descended in a cage, as far

as the air permitted. They recovered two bodies but found no living man at the limit of depth to which they could penetrate.

The Crown Point was still impenetrable. The last cage which had been hoisted there had lost four of its passengers who had been suffocated by the fumes and fallen back to death in the shaft. Still those who survived were certain that other men were alive in the depths. They induced the hoisting engineer to send down the cage once more. A lighted lantern was placed on the cage floor, with the following message:

"We are fast subduing the fire. It is death to attempt to come up from where you are. We shall get you out soon. The gas in the shaft is terrible and produces sure and speedy death. Write a word to us and send it up on the cage, and let us know where you are."

The cage was lowered slowly, stopping at each level on the way down to the bottom at one thousand and one hundred feet, and stopping again to show its signal light at each level on the return trip. When it reached the surface there was no reply to the message. The lantern was out.

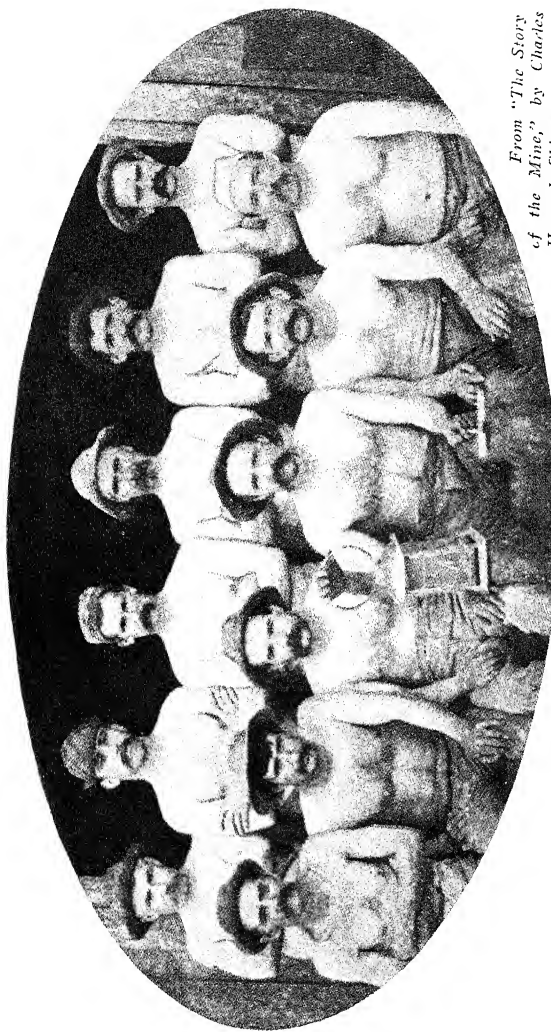
Five hours after the start of the fire, smoke and gas in the Yellow Jacket drew away into the southerly workings. Miners and firemen risked the descent. Every man but one known to have been at work on the level explored was brought up dead. The up-

draft had renewed itself in the Kentuck, and any further activities of firemen or rescue squads were cut off there. The Yellow Jacket had become a little cooler. Firemen descended with a hose to the eight-hundred-foot level and began to fight the flames.

Not one of the imprisoned miners had been brought up alive in the last four hours. Hope for all those below had virtually expired. Still the crowds, divided between hysteria and the dazed silence of terrified misery, surged around the shaft-houses. One by one the firemen, exhausted and almost suffocated, began to come to the surface, to have their places taken at once by others, eager to risk their lives.

It was a form of battle which would try the hearts and intelligence of the best-trained and best-equipped fire fighters of New York or Chicago to-day. Let the reader imagine, if he can, a fire in the Woolworth building, with that building framed in timber instead of steel. Let him understand that as the fighting firemen extinguish the flame upon each timber or in each set of timbers it is necessary to rebuild that portion of the wrecked structure to prevent collapse of the whole before the firemen can advance to the next room or the next floor. Only so can one have some realization of the struggle which went on in the depths of these burning mines.

Firemen and timbermen battled side by side. As fast as the firemen extinguished a blaze, or were blocked by caves and slides which followed collapse of weakened timbers, miners would rush into the



*From "The Story  
of the Mine," by Charles  
Howard Shinn.  
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A GROUP OF COMSTOCK MINERS.

These men worked in depths ranging down to two thousand feet and more, at temperatures as high as one hundred and twenty-five degrees, in air reeking with steam and the fumes of giant powder, sulphur, arsenic and antimony at wages of three dollars and fifty cents to four dollars and fifty cents a day.



breach and shovel out the débris frantically, while timbermen worked above and beside them, installing new braces. As fast as the way was cleared and made comparatively safe for a moment, firemen pressed to the front again, to be displaced again by the miners.

All this tremendous effort was going on in an atmosphere composed of far greater parts of smoke, steam and gas than of oxygen, and in a heat which wilted the strongest men in from five to ten minutes. In places the rock was so hot that the water turned to steam the moment it touched the walls. The hands of scores of the men wrestling with fallen rock and weakened timbers were burned to the bone. Water actually boiled in puddles on the rocky floor.

Still volunteers succeeded volunteers as fast as the burned, gassed and exhausted men were brought to the surface. Despite the deadly peril and killing strain of the work the fight went on. Many of the firemen and miners returned again and again to the battle after an hour in the open air had restored their strength. A stream was kept going all day on the eight-hundred-foot level of the Yellow Jacket. At nine o'clock in the evening the fire was again rising, and a second line of hose was led into the shaft and put to work on the seven-hundred-foot level.

By two o'clock in the morning, nineteen hours after the discovery of the fire, thirteen bodies had been recovered. Some had been found at the bottom of the shaft, eleven hundred feet deep, where they had fallen from higher levels. Others were picked up in the



drifts at the one-thousand-foot level, just where they had fallen under the poisonous gases.

Early the next day the situation in the Crown Point mine became such that it appeared advisable to cut the air pipes on the eight-hundred-foot level. John P. Jones, a veteran of the California quartz mines, who was superintendent of the Crown Point, himself undertook the extremely hazardous task. With one volunteer associate accompanying him to hold a light, Jones stepped aboard the cage in a cloud of smoke and gas, and was dropped into the inferno. Jones was already a popular and influential man in the community and the hundreds who watched him vanish into the fiery pit stood in agony, awaiting the outcome of his heroism.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed without a signal on the hoisting bell. Hope had almost been abandoned when the three taps calling for a lift sounded beside the hoisting engineer. The clutch was thrown in and the cage jerked upward in record time. When the platform reached the surface both Jones and his assistant lay unconscious upon it. A few minutes in the air, however, brought them back to consciousness. They had completed their task, and succumbed to the gas only on the return trip up the shaft. Jones was a popular hero thenceforth.

During the morning ten more bodies were recovered. One dead man was found with hands still gripped upon a ladder, fifty feet above the level from which he had tried to escape. Nine bodies were

heaped together beside an unjointed air pipe on the nine-hundred-foot level of the Crown Point.

Two days later the officials of the mines and of the city government decided that there was no hope of the rescue of any living men. The fire had been burning for more than three days, and appeared to be increasing rather than diminishing in violence. The only hope of checking it seemed to be by cutting off the air.

The shafts therefore were closed and sealed with planks, blankets and wet earth. Steam from the boilers of the hoisting engines was forced down the air pipes to the lower levels. This continued for two days. The shafts were then reopened, volunteers descended and recovered several more bodies. But the influx of fresh air revived the flames, and the rescuers again were driven out. Again the shafts were sealed and pumped full of steam for two more days. Then the steam was shut off to give the workings a chance to cool.

Three days later, ten days after the start of the fire, the shafts were opened once more and some exploration made. Spots of fire were found in numerous drifts and stopes, and extinguished where they could be reached, but the air was so foul that scores of the explorers fainted, and were brought to the surface only with difficulty. Forty-one bodies had been recovered. Hospitals and homes were filled with men in serious condition from burns, gas, or accident incurred in the long struggle. Four bodies were known

to be still in the upper levels of the Kentuck. Effort after effort was made in vain attempt to recover them.

Three weeks after the start of the fire it was again gaining headway. The connections between the Yellow Jacket, Crown Point and Kentuck were all sealed, and the shafts again closed. The works were abandoned until May eighteenth, thirty-nine days after the start of the disaster. Then once more they were reopened and men were able to enter almost every level, rigging air pipes and restoring timbers to put the mines in working condition. Two days later another body was found on the one-hundred-foot level of the Kentuck, leaving only three known to be somewhere in the upper levels of that mine.

But once again the incoming fresh air revived the fire on the eight-hundred-foot levels of the Kentuck and Crown Point. In desperation the superintendents ordered the miners to wall up those drifts and abandon them permanently in the hope that the fire might eventually burn itself out. It did so, but how long it required is in doubt. When these walled furnaces were opened three years later the rocks in their depths were found to be red hot. Only charred bones of the three missing men whose bodies had never been recovered were found in these abandoned drifts.

The most tragic scene in the melodrama of the Comstock had been enacted, and at a period when the district was already in the depths of its worst financial depression. Now not only the mines were in a deplorable situation because of their lack of good ore,

but the miners had been roused to a panic of terror and indignation. Not all of Sharon's wealth and power could correct this situation.

But Adolph Sutro, himself on the verge of collapse with the apparent failure of his years of effort in promotion of the tunnel, was able to see the possibilities which the fire opened for him. Here was an argument and a weapon for the tunnel, fashioned from the bodies of forty-five dead men, tempered by the agonies of hundreds, ready to his hand. He proceeded to use it.

In the meantime, however, some relief from the tension which had gripped the district was necessary. With the elasticity of its youth Virginia City found this relief in the excitement of the competition afforded by the rival pony expresses carrying mail from the railroad at Reno to the Comstock. The district might go to ruin if it would, but the Comstockers would have a little entertainment by the way.

Since the completion of the railroad across the Sierras from San Francisco through Reno, all of the mail and express business of the Comstock as well as most of the freight had come by that route. Mail and express were picked up at Reno by two rival express companies and carried to Virginia City on fast ponies. Wells, Fargo & Company conducted one line and the Pacific Union the opposition. Comstockers did not care particularly which company proved superior, so long as it happened to be the one on which they had bet their money on any certain day. The

point for their entertainment was a relay horse race of notable quality.

Each evening the Comstockers lined the streets of Virginia City to cheer on the winning pony, settle their bets, jeer at their rivals and lay new wagers for the next day. Even the local newspapers took notice of the event, and helped to turn public attention from the town's troubles to its possibilities of entertainment. A few excerpts from *The Enterprise*, written daily at the scene, will give a more realistic idea of the importance of the event than any comment of to-day:

"Mr. Bennett of Wells, Fargo & Company last evening came in from Reno, riding the company's pony, in one hour and twelve minutes. The state of the roads considered, this is remarkably good time. The Pacific Union pony got the start in Reno and was first over the bridge on the river, but was soon passed by the Wells, Fargo & Company rider, who held the lead through to this city. In Reno there is every day as much excitement about the starting of the ponies as there is here at the time of their coming in."

Five days later *The Enterprise* described a "special race," amid "much excitement," with "many bets from drinks to hundreds of dollars." In this contest Wells, Fargo & Company employed eight horses and three riders, while the Pacific Union Company used ten horses and two riders, and still lost the race by eight minutes.

"C Street was lined with eager spectators. The victory gained by Wells, Fargo & Company was in a great measure owing to W. P. Bennett, superintendent, who although forty-four years old, went out and rode through one station himself, using a couple of stage horses that the younger riders were afraid to straddle. . . . Whether we are to have any more racing is not announced, but we know that a race every day would just suit the excitable people of this city, most of whom would stop speculating in stocks and go to betting on the ponies."

But this diversion was comparatively limited and brief. The real sporting event on the Comstock was the more important though less spectacular contest between Sutro and Sharon. This promised to take on new excitement since the disastrous fire in the mines.

## CHAPTER XII

### "A KING IS BORN"

THE Yellow Jacket fire had been a serious blow to Virginia City. All the ballyhoo attendant upon the railroad building then in progress could not change that fact. At the moment of the fire the greatest hope of the district had rested in the Yellow Jacket mine, where a stringer of ore recently discovered on the nine-hundred-foot level was being followed eagerly in the belief that it would lead to new bonanzas. The work of tracing this promising clue was delayed indefinitely by the fire.

In the meantime Yellow Jacket was hoisting less than one-fourth its average yield of earlier years. Crown Point, also stricken by the fire, had paid no dividends for two or three years, and had called upon its stockholders for more than two hundred thousand dollars in assessments to continue its exploration work. John P. Jones, the superintendent who had made himself a popular hero in the Crown Point fire, managed to keep the exploration work going largely because of his own optimism and his reputation with the stockholders, by whom he was known to be a highly efficient mining engineer.

Jones, like so many men who were to become famous on the Comstock, was of foreign birth, though

he had been brought to America from England in infancy by his parents. At the time of the Crown Point fire he was forty years old. He was known throughout Nevada, as he had been in the California mining towns, equally for his jovial good-humor and his driving energy. He had come to California with his brother Henry from Ohio in 1850, having joined a party on Lake Erie and helped to sail their boat all the way down the St. Lawrence River, around Cape Horn and up the Pacific Coast, to San Francisco. At first in the placer mines and later in the deep mines of California he had gained experience, reputation as a most efficient engineer, but little money. The Crown Point mine, its greatest bonanzas apparently exhausted, had finally enticed him to come from his engineering job in Calaveras County, California, to superintend the work of search for new ore bodies.

Crown Point stock had fallen after the fire to a price which rated the entire property, including one hundred and forty thousand dollars invested in equipment, at a total of twenty-four thousand dollars. Kentuck also was in borrasca, and calling constantly for assessments to continue operation. Other famous mines such as Ophir, Gould & Curry, Belcher, Hale & Norcross, Chollar-Potosi, were either working entirely in country rock or were hoisting but a fraction of their previous production of ore. Though these mines were not in the path of the great fire, the general reaction was a menace to their continued development. All prices dropped.



In this situation John Mackay and James Fair stepped from their jobs as superintendents into ownership of their first mine. Mackay, later to become the famous father of a famous son, was an Irish immigrant, like Fair. He was an unpretentious young man who had been easily ignored in the miscellaneous throngs of the Comstock. Only the level gaze of his keen gray eyes, set deep under abrupt brows beneath a straight high forehead would have differentiated him from the rabble for a close observer. The patrician effect of a slightly Roman nose probably would have been ignored as entirely out of keeping with the rough costume of a working miner which he had worn during most of his years in Virginia City.

John W. Mackay had quit a clerk's job in New York in 1852 to make his fortune in the California placers. He had been too young to come with the first rush in 'forty-nine and 'fifty, as the other great men of the Comstock had done. Still a boy in years, though a man in character, he had entered the placers too late to seize an easy fortune. In eight years of labor, however, he had accumulated a few thousand dollars, which he had invested in the Comstock with the first rush. And promptly he had lost it. Without complaint, he went to work as a mucker in one of the mines at four dollars and fifty cents a day. His energy and skill soon won him a job as timberman, with more possibilities of experience but no more money. He had worked at that for years, familiarizing himself with all the underground workings of

the Comstock, saving his money, and adding to it a little by judicious stock speculation when he had personal inside information as to developments in the mines where he was employed. Eventually he had been made a shift boss and then superintendent of the Caledonia Tunnel and Mining Company.

Fair had had long experience as superintendent of the Ophir. Both men knew the miles of underground workings below Virginia City and Gold Hill as well as they knew the paths from shaft to home. They were students of geology as well as capable mining engineers. They had accumulated a little money, and a mutual respect for each other's ability.

So they used their capital to buy control of the Bullion mine at a low price. Its holdings lay in unproductive ground between the rich workings of Virginia City and Gold Hill, but it was ground which the friends and partners believed must contain good ore at depth. Mackay went into the mine as superintendent. He did not have the reputation which he later acquired, and the stockholders were allowing their holdings to be sold out rather than pay more assessments. Mackay and Fair largely financed the work.

At about the same time Mackay took advantage of the great depression in stocks which followed the fire in the non-productive Kentuck, to buy heavily into that property. Then, with Fair, he investigated the Hale & Norcross, one of the richest of the early mines. Its shares had risen to twenty-one hundred dollars each on the San Francisco exchange in 1868, and then

dropped to forty-two dollars. The company owned a large section of unexplored territory, and had used its early profits to install the best machinery available. At forty-two dollars it seemed a rare bargain, although it was producing practically nothing at the moment. Mackay and Fair, like Sharon and Sutro, had an unquenchable faith in the future of the lode. And their faith was based upon personal knowledge much more accurate than that of the promoter of the bank monopoly and the promoter of the tunnel.

Incidentally, they formed a working agreement with two San Francisco men who eventually were to attain wealth and importance equal to their own as bonanza kings. These men were the financiers of the group, James C. Flood and William S. O'Brien.

Flood and O'Brien were saloon keepers in San Francisco. Like Mackay and Fair, they were Irish, though Flood was born in New York, in 1826. He was a thick-set powerful man, of much the same type as Fair, genial in social contacts but exacting and domineering in business. O'Brien was less forceful in character, as he was in appearance, having much more the aspect of an efficient head waiter or butler than of a conspicuously successful business man. He never aspired to rise, nor did he rise, socially, far above the level of the more convivial card-playing friends of his saloon-keeping days. Still he was shrewd, though not notably ambitious or energetic.

The partners had both come to San Francisco in 1849, and had engaged in various ventures before

they became associated in a popular bar in the financial district of the city. When the mining stock exchange was opened, this bar was a convenient and popular resort for the stock gamblers. Flood & O'Brien dispensed good liquor at high prices to the mining speculators, and acquired some capital. At the same time they acquired a wide and friendly acquaintance among the more successful operators. It was the successful speculators, not the losers, who frequented the expensive bars, and usually they were in an expansive and generous mood.

Some of them, inspired both by the easy profits in hand and by the quality of the Flood & O'Brien liquors, occasionally offered the saloon men a tip on the market. Flood & O'Brien were shrewd. They knew that more men lost than won on that board. They knew that while they were serving such men as Lucky Baldwin, Jim Keene, Bill Lent, Johnny Skae and General Gashweiler at the mahogany bar, others ruined by the stock gamble were at the rear door begging a hand-out from the kitchen which prepared the saloon's elaborate free lunch.

They did not plunge. Instead they watched the ups and downs of the stocks which they were advised to buy or sell. So they learned who among their generous customers were the most consistent winners. Then, and not until then, they began to follow the advice of those speculators whom practical results proved to be wise and well-informed. Operating on advice thus proved, Flood & O'Brien began to beat

the market. What was more important, they began to learn it.

Their profits increased with their experience. Wisdom and caution increased with both. They saw clearly that authentic inside information was essential to successful operation on a large scale. No one could follow the eccentric gyrations of Comstock prices indefinitely on tips, or upon any system. Information had to be prompt and accurate. How else had William Sharon been able to buy Belcher stock at \$6.00, and hold it until it climbed to \$1,525? Not every one could have the luck of Lucky Baldwin, who had given orders to sell out his Comstock holdings at a low figure, sailed to Hawaii forgetting to endorse the certificates, and had returned to find himself still in possession of securities which had been multiplied in value a hundred times.

There was no rhyme or reason in that market. The Alpha's stock, without ever declaring a dividend, sold at \$1,570 in a February, fell to \$33.00 in September, rose to \$62.00 the following February, sank to \$11.00 in October, rose to \$21.00 in March, sank to \$3.00 in September, rose again to \$100, and dwindled to nothing when the shareholders refused to pay further assessments and the mine was abandoned. Its career was typical. No wise man could play such a market without accurate information, straight from the mining superintendents who were tracing or hoisting the ore.

Flood & O'Brien were wise.

Through interests which they had obtained in the Kentuck and the Hale & Norcross mines they became acquainted with Mackay and Fair when the latter bought into these properties. They recognized the practical wisdom and invaluable strategic position of the engineers. Mackay and Fair recognized the advantage of being associated with such shrewd operators on the exchange. An informal agreement was reached. The group of men who were to go down in history as the true bonanza kings was formed.

Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien soon owned control of the Bullion, the Kentuck, the Hale & Norcross and the Savage. Even Sharon, occupied as he was with the completion of the railroad and the strengthening of his grasp on the mines, mills, transportation and supplies of the district, was forced to sit up and pay attention to this Scotch-Irish combination.

Hitherto, Adolph Sutro, a German Jew, was the only man who had questioned and dared to oppose the Sharon dictatorship of the Comstock. Sharon believed he had crushed Sutro, though that tenacious individual was still battling, having carried his problem to the miners themselves. Now it seemed that Mackay and Fair were daring to assert themselves, to threaten the powers of the Bank of California and its monopolistic syndicate headed by Sharon. Something would have to be done about it.

But Sharon was a busy man of vast and complicated affairs. Before he could plan and start his campaign to depose Mackay and Fair or buy them out with the

monopoly's money, the Hale & Norcross mine struck a small bonanza under Fair's skilful engineering, and paid seven hundred and twenty-eight thousand dollars in dividends, at least half of which went into the pockets of Fair and his associates. The opposition war chest was beginning to fill up.

At the same time the persistent Sutro ceased the mosquito-like buzzing which had annoyed Sharon for years, and stabbed. The disastrous fire in the Yellow Jacket, Kentuck and Crown Point mines had aroused the miners of the district to a frenzy which the ordinary hardships of withering heat, bad air, and tuberculosis acquired in the mines had failed to inspire. The miners had never been afraid of Sharon. They were independent. Good miners could always get a job. No others would enter the mines. If untried laborers did enter, they could accomplish nothing.

The workers had tolerated conditions as workers have done throughout the history of the world. Each day they carried their lunch buckets from homes and boarding-houses, and sweated and strained in the mines, simply because it was their routine of life. Many had families to maintain. Others spent their wages in riotous relaxation in the saloons, gambling-houses and brothels of the town. They worked because it is the habit of civilized men to work. But they were ripe for revolt.

Adolph Sutro recognized the opportunity. He saw in these thousands of workers a potential power

greater than Sharon's. Without the daily labor of these hard men there could be no ore raised from the mines to feed the mills to provide dividends to nourish the monopoly. There could be no traffic to maintain the Sharon railroad, and no demand for timber to pay the lumber company. There could be no business, no profit and no city.

Sutro possessed some of the powers of a demagogue. Also he possessed an imagination equal to his energy and far in advance of the ordinary business men of his time. He engaged an artist and directed the preparation of a lurid poster, at a time when lurid posters did not have the competition on wall and fence and bill-board which they have to-day. The artist depicted a cross-section of the Yellow Jacket mine, revealing the shaft a thousand feet deep with drifts and crosscuts swept by crimson flame and billowing smoke, with falling timbers, burning ladders, and collapsing walls amid which hundreds of men were shown plunging to death, writhing amid the fire, buried by the rocks, while wives and children screamed and wrung their hands in despair at the mouth of the shaft. Adjoining this scene was another, of the same mine in flames, while the miners escaped in orderly fashion through the Sutro tunnel, pictured as completed below.

It was a telling poster in the circumstances. Posted on every available wall and fence around Virginia City, it recalled and revived the terror which had swept the district at the time of the fire. The at-



tendant message that Adolph Sutro would speak at Piper's Opera House on a specified night was impressed on every mind. And when the night came the hall was filled and a crowd clamored in the street to hear the message. It was an impassioned message, inspired in part by Sutro's own bitter disappointments in five years of struggle with the Sharon monopoly, in part by his unfaltering conviction that only through the tunnel could the Comstock be saved, and in part by the gift of demagogic appeal which was his. George Wharton James, historian and biographer, describes the speech as "a revelation of the spirit of a man of growing power; a man who unconsciously was preparing himself to be a Voice for the common people."

Be that as it may, Sutro opened the flood-gates of an oratory so natural, and so apparently devoid of political trimming or straddling that he held his audience spellbound.

"Laboring men of Nevada, crush out that hydra-headed monster, that serpent in your midst—the Bank of California. . . . The enemy who has spun his web around you until you are almost helpless has bribed your judges, packed your juries, hired false witnesses, bought legislators, elected representatives to defend their iniquity, imposed taxes upon you for private benefit, and now dares you to expose them. . . . Rouse up then, fellow citizens. You have no Andrew Jackson among you to crush the bank which has

taken your liberties, but you have the power within yourselves. I do not mean to incite you to violence. . . . That would be unwise, unnecessary, and would recoil upon yourselves. But I do mean to say you can destroy your enemy by simple concert of action. . . . They know full well that the first pick struck into the Sutro Tunnel will be the first pick into their graves. . . . Come forward then, and subscribe your names. Pay in your money promptly; drop all prejudices; let all objections fall to the ground; let all make one joint, grand, unanimous effort, and victory will be ours."

The crowd liked the speech. They felt Sutro's driving power. They liked a fighter. They liked fair play. They greeted the peroration with a roar of applause, and pressed forward in a body to subscribe. Their money came quickly into the tunnel company's treasury.

On October 19, 1869, amid flaunting banners and broadly smiling faces, with the blare of all the brass bands which could be collected in western Nevada, Adolph Sutro broke ground with a pick on the slope above the Carson River where the tunnel was to start. It was a month before the celebration at Gold Hill which Sharon staged to welcome the first locomotive over the completed railroad from Carson City. Sutro was a better showman than Sharon.

But though Sharon felt the stab of Sutro's violent and persistent energy, he was occupied with more

imminent matters. Why bother with a mosquito when a hawk threatened. He forgot that the mosquito might carry the lingering death of yellow fever. He could not forget the fact that Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien were assuming importance upon the lode. Fortunately for his peace of mind he did not know that a defection in the ranks of his own syndicate also threatened.

Sharon concentrated all his great business skill and energy upon the operation of his new railroad to the syndicate's mills in the Carson Valley, upon the movement of timber into the mines, and upon the extension of the line to Reno for connection with the newly completed Central Pacific. Thus would he consolidate his position, monopolize all the freight and passenger traffic of the Comstock, drive the last of the silk-popping stage-drivers and mule-skinning freighters from the highways, add their profits to his own, and by tightening the grasp of his monopoly squeeze out the upstart Irish. The Jew could wait. Plenty of time to deal with him later.

For a moment Fate again played into his hands. Mackay and Fair sank the profits of their small Hale & Norcross bonanza in the unproductive Bullion and the almost equally unproductive Savage. Sharon watched Bullion and Savage stock slip steadily downward on the San Francisco board, and rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Their threat to compete with the power of the Bank of California seemed to have flared and faded. They were not the first men

who had made a million dollars in the Comstock, and quickly lost it in the same hole from which it was dug. Mackay would soon be back with a pick and shovel at four dollars a day in the head of a drift. Fair, chastened by his failure to compete with such financial and executive genius as that of Sharon, probably would be a good and valuable dog. He had certain recognized ability as a mining superintendent which the bank ring could use. Very well. The syndicate chief heaved a sigh of relief.

Immediately it turned into a groan. The official awoke to discover that stock in the Crown Point had skyrocketed from two dollars to ninety dollars a share, and that the controlling interest was held privately by its superintendent, John P. Jones, hero of the Crown Point fire, and Alvinza Hayward, a minor member of Sharon's own ring.

The cue of the melodrama then was for Sharon, Ralston and Mills to rise in offended dignity and demand if there could be no honor among thieves. But they missed it. This was no play to them. Being merely pragmatic business men of extraordinary ability they took the blow standing, shook their heads, and decided not to trust Jones and Hayward again if they could avoid it.

The Crown Point mine, owning five hundred and forty feet on the lode, had paid no dividends for several years. In fact it had levied two hundred and forty thousand dollars in assessments, which accounted for its price of two dollars a share. At this

price the total valuation of the mine was one-fifth the actual cost of the machinery which had been installed. In that situation Hayward had obtained the appointment of Jones, a mining superintendent who had developed a great reputation for "a nose for ore" in California, to direct continued exploration work in the mine.

For two years Jones had been running drifts at the nine-hundred-foot, one-thousand-foot, and the eleven-hundred-foot levels without cutting a single stringer of ore which promised to lead to a profitable deposit. Disgusted, he started in the summer of 1870 to make his final cut. With the drift two or three hundred feet along, the hard gray country rock which he had met on every hand began to grow softer and reveal thin streaks of quartz. Then he encountered a seam of clay. Cutting through this he found a soft white formation containing small knobs of ore.

Superintendent Jones reported privately to Hayward, who had obtained the job for him. Together they began to buy the two-dollar shares very quietly, wherever they could be picked up from stockholders who had long been disgusted by repeated assessments and no dividends. They did not inform their friends in the bank syndicate. Steady buying, however, gradually began to have an influence in the market and the price climbed slowly. Stocks of scores of Comstock mines had risen so frequently in the ten years of the lode's activity, and had fallen so swiftly

time after time, that no one was greatly excited by the slow rise of Crown Point. Hayward and Jones obtained control before the public or even the Bank of California realized that here in their midst was a new bonanza. Then the price hit ninety dollars with a bang which awakened the entire district. A few weeks later Jones opened another drift at the twelve-hundred-foot level and cut the same body of white quartz and ore. The price jumped to one hundred and eighty dollars.

The entire district was stimulated by the news. Hayward and Jones suddenly had become rich men. It was like the old days. The Comstock was not exhausted as many persons had feared. All it needed was men willing and able to dig and dig and keep on digging. Below every ore chamber was another ore chamber. Its riches were inexhaustible. True, the richer ores might be hidden two or three or four hundred feet below and to one side of the next previous bonanza, but they were there, waiting to reward the patience and confidence of those men who would seek them out. The district took on a new lease of life. The energy and optimism which had been flagging through 1868 and 1869 were restored.

The temporary threat of Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien to the ascendancy of the Bank of California was forgotten. Jones and Hayward had assumed greater importance. They had left the bank in the lurch. And while they were doing it they decided to do a thorough job. They would not even give the

Union Mill and Mining Company a contract to crush and refine their ore. They had money to do as they pleased. They organized the Nevada Mill and Mining Company as a rival to the bank's milling monopoly.

It was Sharon's first definite defeat in the six years in which he had been building a great monopoly on the Comstock, and building up the Comstock through this monopoly. Poetic justice will be seen by some readers in the fact that it was a defeat which came through defection in his own ranks, and through methods which his reputation indicates he would not have scrupled to use himself.

But there were other defeats to come. The true bonanza kings had been born on the Comstock.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE VIGILANTES TAKE HOLD

THIS then was the situation ten years after the first rush eastward across the Sierras to "the greatest silver deposit in the history of the world," in the Washoe district of Nevada. Virginia City had grown from a huddle of huts on the slope of Mount Davidson to a city of twenty thousand inhabitants, had burned down, slumped to half that number, and was again growing toward the metropolitan population of forty thousand which was to mark the height of its prosperity in the days of the big bonanza.

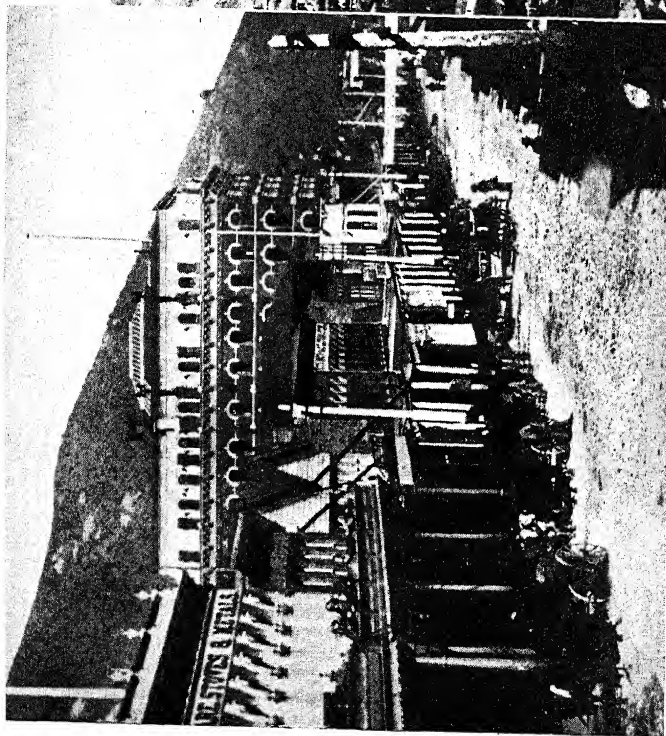
William Sharon, operating for the Bank of California, had organized the business of the district as only an unscrupulous monopoly can organize business. He had suffered his first defeat through the defection of Alvinza Hayward and John P. Jones. But he was still the greatest power on the Comstock. Jones' discovery and exploitation of the Crown Point bonanza had given sudden and powerful stimulus to the business of the district, which had slumped painfully with the exhaustion of the earlier bonanzas. Sutro had started work upon his tunnel with fifty thousand dollars subscribed by the miners, after six years of failure to raise the millions which he



needed. Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien were a threat in the background, with control of four mines, two of which, the Hale & Norcross and the Kentuck, promised riches, while two, the Bullion and the Savage, appeared to be failures.

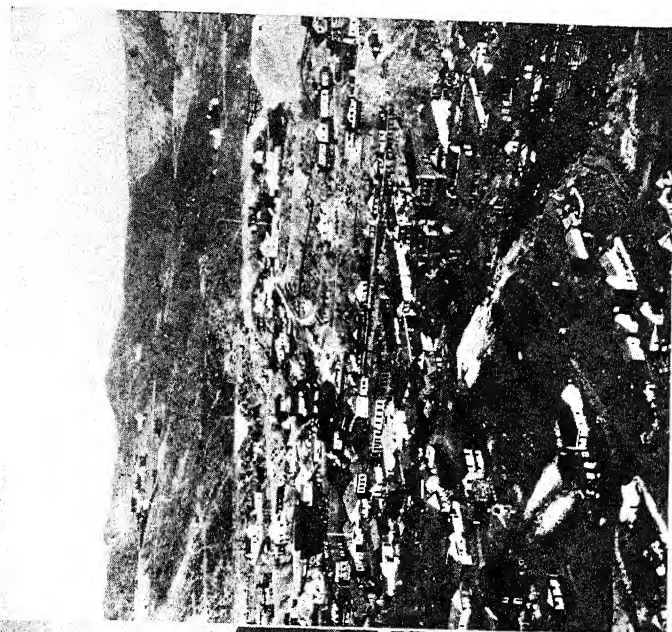
Virginia City still straggled down the side of Mount Davidson and over the divide to the south toward the adjacent Gold Hill. Gold Hill still straggled down Gold Canyon, along the old road toward Dayton, Carson City and California. Saloons and dives where a murder a week was common, and three a week not especially exciting, lined the canyon below Gold Hill. A long row of whitewashed cabins and cottages housed the "good time women" below but convenient to C Street, the main thoroughfare through Virginia City. Below this street again stretched the shacks and cabins which constituted the Chinese section of the town. Still farther down, lower even than the Chinese, and far lower than the painted women, lived the Indians, picking a precarious living from the garbage cans of their neighbors up the slope, or occasionally picking up a left-over job as they picked up a left-over loaf.

As in the history of all successful mining camps, the engrossing business of wringing fortunes from the earth had come to occupy the attention of the leading citizens to the complete exclusion of other civic interests. Such men as Sharon, Jones, Mackay, Fair, Sutro, seemed to have entirely too much on their minds to leave room for anything on their consciences.



*Courtesy California State Library.*

VIEW OF "C" STREET, VIRGINIA CITY, IN THE 'SEVENTIES. International Hotel in distance. Mount Davidson in background. All these buildings are now gone or in ruins.



*Courtesy California State Library.*

PANORAMA OF VIRGINIA CITY IN THE 'SIXTIES.

Note the great mine dumps in the very heart of the town.



A murder a week or a murder a day in the dives was to them an incident and nothing more as long as the principals were not men of immediate use to them. And the principals in such affairs seldom were of use.

The courts were of interest only in so far as they could be relied upon to give the magnates the best of every civil contest. The criminal courts were of no interest whatever. As long as a coroner's jury reported that "John Doe came to his death at the hands of a party or parties unknown to the jury," and did not identify John Doe as a man of prominence, the incident was dismissed as neatly and sufficiently closed. The robbery of a mill, of course, was different. Then the entire organization of justice would be thrown into the task of detecting the criminals and punishing them to the utmost. But the criminals were quite aware of this, and confined themselves largely to hold-ups of drunken wayfarers, or to gambling frauds and consequent knife and gun-play in the lower saloons.

The murder of one card-sharper by another was on the whole considered rather a good thing. It saved the community expense. Why bother to punish the murderer? Another card-sharper or a fighting drunk would get him in another week or two. As long as they confined their attentions to each other they could be ignored, safely and economically.

There had been one notable exception to this rule, or perhaps merely a variation of it. The murderers had chosen a victim who probably they believed

would not be seriously mourned, and therefore would not subject them to any serious attention from the authorities. She was a woman of the class which the journalists of Virginia City identified as "fair but frail." But to the great discomfiture of the criminals involved, she proved to be far more than that.

The woman's name was Julia Bulette, a beauty of French extraction who might well have been the prototype of the famous Cherry Melotte in Rex Beach's Alaskan novel, *The Spoilers*. She had ruled for several years as queen of that row of white cottages lying just above Chinatown, and incidentally was a member by special appointment of the Virginia City Engine Company, a social as well as a fire-fighting organization. The fair Julia had enjoyed a certain community of soul as well as body with the hard-shelled miners and business men of the Engine Company. Indirectly she had wielded considerable power in the town.-

Then she was found robbed and murdered in her bed. The fire company arose en masse to do honor to her public spirit. It typified the spirit of the Comstock. So the men of the Engine Company, some of them even defying their wives, clad themselves in their dress uniforms of light blue with huge pearl buttons, and followed the coffin of their patroness from church to cemetery. The wives of those few who had wives stared with hard eyes from behind closed blinds and prepared for the private speech which awaited the home-coming of such public-spirited citizens.

That had been a great day for Virginia City, an opportunity for self-expression such as is seldom granted to a community. But a greater day was to follow.

An ordinary murder could be ignored, but not this. The last honors conferred upon Julia Bulette would not have been complete in the minds of the Comstockers without a valiant effort to bring her killer to the gallows. The effort was made.

A French adventurer known as John Millain was arrested and charged with the crime. The evidence indicated that two other men had induced him to accompany them to the woman's house with the promise of a job concerning which they did not give details. One of them had entered the house and the other had left with Millain after a brief period of waiting outside, and had returned much later in the evening. Leaving Millain outside, he had then entered the house, returning to the waiting man after a half-hour had passed. The first man also appeared then, with his arms full of furs and other loot, including two gold watches and some valuable jewelry.

Millain testified that he had not suspected a murder even at that time, and had even protested the robbery, but that the other men told him he had implicated himself by acting as lookout, and that he might as well have a share in the loot. He believed them, and accepted and sold some of the stolen goods. Not until the next day did he know that murder had been committed, he said. Then when excitement mounted be-

cause of the unsuspected popularity of the victim, he had fled the camp, together with the killers. Millain had been captured and brought back, but the others made good their escape.

But the aroused citizenry demanded blood in expiation of the murder of their patroness, and Millain was convicted of the crime. Then an interesting psychological situation developed. The more painfully respectable women who had watched the funeral of the fair Julia from behind closed shades looked upon the prisoner as a romantic figure who had relieved them of the competition of a professional charmer who had proved herself a power among the men of the community.

Though they did not condone murder, they were thankful that since a murderer had been moved to strike, his blow had fallen upon Julia Bulette. They were willing to view the prisoner as an instrument of divine justice. The fact that the instrument was to be destroyed was just one more indication of the inscrutability of Providence. Their men had defied them in the incident of the funeral. They could now assert their own independence by extending sympathy to the convicted man. They extended it most cheerfully in the form of the finest delicacies that they could prepare. Few condemned men in history, unless it may have been some prepared for primitive sacrifice or cannibalistic feast, have been nourished as was John Millain.

On the day of his execution the entire city turned

out. Gingerbread balconies all along the line of march from the sheriff's office to the gallows a mile north of town were crowded. The sidewalks were jammed. A uniformed company of sixty of the National Guard, surrounding the closed carriage in which the prisoner rode with two priests, had difficulty in pressing back the throngs to make way for the cortège. The crowds lined the roads far beyond the city limits, and other crowds swarmed upon the hillsides which afforded a view of the gallows. Hundreds had brought their lunches. Peddlers did a thriving business in peanuts, popcorn and red lemonade.

Men, women, children and babies were there. Chinese, Indians, Cornishmen, Mexicans and Americans mingled. Piute squaws with babies on their backs struggled for a place between women of the town. The most respectable wives seized the opportunity to turn their backs upon the trollops, but never upon the gallows. Children munched peanuts and sandwiches. Pasty-faced miners who seldom saw the sun passed the bottle and puckered their eyes against the glare.

Millain mounted the gallows with an easy step, kneeled for the blessing of the priests, denied his guilt in a ringing voice, thanked the women who had brought delicacies to his cell, dropped, jerked, died and dangled at the end of his rope. Virginia City trudged homeward, strewing the shells of hard-boiled eggs, the bones of fried chicken lunches, and scraps of food for half a mile over the hillside.



It was truly a Roman holiday. Virginia City had much of the spirit and some of the morals of Rome in the days of the decline. But the law could not always find such a spectacular example for the demonstration of justice. So many murders went unpunished that some citizens were increasingly pained by the demoralization of the police and criminal courts. These were lesser citizens from the viewpoint of official power. They could not displace a judge or destroy a chief of police. They could, however, usurp some of the misplaced power if they did so secretly. The successful operation of the vigilantes in the demoralized San Francisco of the 'fifties was fresh in the minds of many. The example could hardly be ignored.

So when one Arthur Perkins Heffernan so far forgot himself as to choose the bar of the town's most respectable hotel instead of an ordinary boozing den in which to kill an enemy, an organization quickly sprang into existence to take the action which was not expected of the courts. Heffernan had been arrested and was in jail, but the vigilantes had known other men, equally guilty, to walk out of that jail to freedom and carousal with the jury which had acquitted them. An exception in this case was determined upon.

Masked men were stationed at midnight at the four corners of the block which housed the jail. Every one seeking to enter the block was turned back without explanation. "Go back!" emphasized by a rifle

with bayonet attached, was sufficient. It was all very sober and efficient. And just as quietly and efficiently another group of masked men entered the jail, awakened the sheriff and a deputy, took their keys and held them quietly while still others unlocked the cell occupied by Heffernan, or Perkins as he was commonly known, and led him away.

Half an hour later a cannon boomed from an abandoned fort on the outskirts of the city. The vigilantes were following closely the ritual of their San Francisco predecessors, who always announced their hangings by the ringing of a fire-bell. At daylight the body of the murderer was found hanging from the old hoisting frame over an abandoned shaft. Upon it was a card bearing the numerals "601." Thereafter the vigilante organization was known as "601."

Virginia City took the news quietly. It was that sort of city. Its leading men who had no time to bother with the enforcement of criminal law, had no more time to bother with the enforcement of lynch law. The coroner's jury which found that "Arthur Perkins Heffernan came to his death at the hands of a party or parties unknown to the jury," finished and labeled and tucked away that case as neatly and finally as similar juries had tucked away innumerable murder cases.

No effort was made to discover the lynching party. Only those few citizens who had been met by the masked vigilantes and turned back from the neigh-

borhood of the jail while the murderer was being removed for execution had any personal interest in the case. And they were sufficiently intelligent not to speak in personalities. Several of them had been called by name by the masked guards. If the guards knew them, they perhaps suspected the identity of the guards, but they maintained a discreet silence on that point.

The hanging had only a slightly chastening effect upon the community, and none whatever upon the courts. Soon therefore the old cannon boomed again at midnight, and the following morning one George B. Kirk was found dangling from a rope's end. And on his body also were the fateful numerals 601.

This incident aroused a little more interest. If 601 were really operating to relieve the community of bad men, and correct the condition of free and easy murder which had marked the dens and dives of the district, regardless of the inefficiency of established authority, perhaps it was worthy of respect. Some informal investigation into the record of Kirk followed, and was given publicity.

The man was identified as a murderer who had killed a man in California. He was also an ex-convict from the Nevada state prison. He had received a "ticket of leave" from 601 ordering him to quit Virginia City and stay quit. He had done the one but not the other. On the night of his return he was identified immediately. Evidently 601 had a comprehensive system of espionage. A report was carried

quickly to those most interested that Kirk was to be found in one of the houses of the whitewashed row which lay just above Chinatown. A group gathered at the house, seized the man who had defied unofficial authority, marched him to the north end of town, and hanged him from the flume of the Sierra Nevada mine.

This lesson struck terror to the hearts of the bad men of the district. Scores departed without waiting for tickets of leave. No one who had received such a ticket ever came back after the word went abroad as to what had happened to Kirk. For the time being, Virginia City had cleaned itself up. It was prepared to enjoy the lighter side of life.

Entertainment at Piper's Opera House varied from a barnstorming production of *Toodles* to Shakespear-ean repertoire and from the wildcat and bulldog fights to a battle between a bull and a bear. Most of the residents of Virginia City took their entertainment raw, as they did their whisky.

After a shift in the mines, twelve hundred feet below the surface, in temperatures as high as one hundred and twenty degrees, amid a poisonous fog of powder smoke and steam from dripping walls, what the miners wanted was recreation. They cared little whether it was "The Montgomery Queen's Great Show, with an African Eland, an Abyssinian Ibex, Cassowaries, and the Only Female Somersault Rider in the World," or a battle to the death between a badger and half a dozen dogs. The influence of Mark

Twain's crude humor in *The Enterprise* had not been toward a delicate taste in literature or drama. His subsequent humorous lecture about the Sandwich Islands had been enjoyed, but forgotten.

The Comstockers craved action—fight or frolic. Frequently either one became the other. Either Adolph Sutro's address to their passions, or a horse-race in the sage-brush would draw a crowd. A public hanging could be, and was, turned into a picnic, or a picnic could be organized with equal success in its own right.

Four thousand residents of the district moved in mass to make merry at the Washoe Valley estate of the late great Sandy Bowers, the same who had announced at his extravagant banquet in the International Hotel a few years earlier that he had money to throw at the birds. He had, and did. The product of Mr. and Mrs. Bowers' united twenty feet on the Gold Hill end of the lode had brought them from fifty to one hundred thousand dollars a month for many months. It had paid for the grand tour through Mrs. Bowers' native Scotland, and through England, France and Italy. It had purchased innumerable Paris gowns for the former washerwoman and boarding-house keeper, and innumerable ponies of Napoleon brandy for the former mule-skinner. It had purchased jewels, a throne carved with fleur-de-lis, state bedroom sets including hand-painted wash-bowls and slop jars, and other furnishings of similar taste and quality, all shipped from Europe around the Horn to

San Francisco and freighted across the Sierras to adorn the stone mansion in Washoe Valley. It had purchased caviar and truffles and champagne for the roughneck miners who attended the Bowers' receptions. It had financed hundreds of miners and prospectors seeking grub-stakes from their friend Sandy. But it had not saved their two babies and Sandy from death, or provided funds to maintain the mansion after the failure of the mine in 1868.

Mrs. Bowers had been forced to turn the place into a resort, with its elaborate grounds and swimming ponds. She opened for business with "The First Grand Annual Rural Entertainment of the Pacific Coast Pioneers." Five brass bound locomotives had started from Virginia City drawing twenty flatcars crowded with picnickers, brass bands, waving flags and yowling children, while the hoisting works of a dozen mines screamed a farewell from their whistles. At Gold Hill five more crowded cars joined the train and the entire force of the Rock Island mine lined up to salute the party as the train sped by at fifteen miles an hour. More cars and more crowds joined at every station.

The thousands descended upon the Bowers place, opened hampers and ate and drank. The ladies played discreetly at croquet, while a few of the bolder joined in the archery contest. The children swarmed on the swings and the "flying horses," and fell into the ponds. The National Guard exhibited its skill at target shooting. Every one danced in the new pavilion

which Mrs. Bowers had had erected for the occasion. Between these varied activities every one ate and drank some more. A fight here and there and now and then enlivened proceedings and prevented monotony. It was a great day, and one of many great days on the Comstock.

Mrs. Bowers wasted no pity upon herself in her reduced state. She was still the hostess, though the guests paid. She was certain that her mine would soon "come in" again. If it did not, some other mines would, and probably by that time she would own an interest in them. Few of the Comstockers ever felt sorry for themselves. They were Comstockers. They seized with avidity, even with greed upon whatever life might have to offer, and went on, feebly or valiantly to the next thing.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE RISING TIDE OF SILVER

THE future glittered more brilliantly in Virginia City than it had in any of its ten years of fluctuating fortune. John P. Jones was blocking out a bonanza of millions in the Crown Point. Sharon was extending his railroad northward to connect with the Central Pacific and give cheap and speedy connection to either coast. Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien were continuing their careful search of the lode for greater bonanzas. Adolph Sutro recognized the necessity of renewed action on his part.

The fifty thousand dollars which he had obtained from the miners as the result of his Piper's Opera House appeal was a bagatelle. He needed perhaps a hundred times that much. The bill for five million dollars' subsidy from the government had been forgotten by Congress in the excitement attendant upon the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. Still his best hope seemed to lie in Washington. He reached there just in time to prevent the Bank of California's political henchmen from obtaining repeal of the measure which had made Comstock mine titles dependent upon adherence to the tunnel contracts. And while the iron was hot he struck again, further



strengthening his technical position by obtaining a change in the federal mining laws which would prevent similar attacks from his enemies in the future.

Then he stook ship for Europe. In Paris he found a leading banker who had been impressed by his victory in Congress, and was further impressed by Sutro's arguments. The banker endorsed the project and agreed to raise fifteen million francs to put into the tunnel. The promoter was elated. Success was within sight at last. Three million dollars would complete the tunnel in three years, or before the shafts reached to its level on the lode. The profits of his company would be millions, and the advantage to the mines tens of millions. He set about joyously to expand his enterprise by raising funds in England for building the great group of improved mills at the mouth of the tunnel to work all Comstock ore at greatly reduced prices, and incidentally to put the Bank of California's monopoly of mills and ore transportation out of business.

Before he could make more than a few preliminary moves, however, war was declared between France and Prussia. The French banker's promise of fifteen million vanished in the smoke of battle, exactly as the once promised five million dollars from the United States Government had vanished in the fog of debate over the Johnson impeachment.

The entire world seemed to be conspiring to crush one man. He was not to be crushed. He returned once more to the Comstock and began once more to

peddle stock to local men in Virginia City and San Francisco, getting a hundred dollars here and a thousand there. Any amount was acceptable if it kept even a few miners at work in the tunnel, now a few hundred feet into the mountainside. When he had no prospect for a single share of stock, he stripped his own powerful body to the waist and labored beside the muckers.

In the spring of 1871, Jones' and Hayward's Crown Point bonanza guaranteed an added production of \$5,000,000 to the lode. The stock which Jones and Hayward had started to buy secretly at \$2.00 a share was worth more than \$1,000 a share. Within another year it was to reach \$1,825, giving a valuation of \$22,000,000 to a property which had been rated at a total of \$24,000 only eighteen months earlier. Belcher, adjoining Crown Point, struck pay dirt. It was owned largely by the Sharon group. Its stock boomed.

Though Sharon and the Bank of California might be chagrined by the defection of Jones and Hayward and the establishment of the Nevada Mill and Mining Company to compete with the monopoly's mills, their chagrin was tempered by the attendant profits. All the stocks on the lode, good or bad, paying dividends or levying assessments, moved up in sympathy. The speculating and investing public was excited once more. Unchastened clerks and widows and waiters appeared to take the places of those who had lost their entire capital in previous speculation.

The total valuation of properties in the district increased by forty-five million dollars. For the first time in several years the Bank of California was clearly out of the woods. All the properties upon which it held mortgages were now worth far more than the money loaned. The timber business and the railroad business and the milling business were returning large profits. Sharon shrewdly cashed in on what he believed to be the more precarious holdings.

The renewed activity all along the line was seized upon by Sutro as another argument in favor of the tunnel, just as the period of depression had been used similarly. Here were shafts and drifts and stopes a thousand feet deep, and headed into the second thousand feet, while the men who worked them were being drowned out by subterranean floods, poisoned by bad air, and generally reduced in efficiency. Some mines were lifting a hundred times as much water as they were lifting ore and waste rock combined. As far back as 1864 Ophir had struck a water pocket which filled the shaft to a depth of one hundred and sixty feet and defied the pumps, while production stopped. Belcher had pumped as much as one million gallons a day. Whenever the machinery failed, as it did frequently under this tremendous load, weeks were required to clear the mine for continued production. The greatest pumping machinery yet developed had been installed in the wetter mines—Ophir, Yellow Jacket, Crown Point, Overman, Justice, Uncle Sam. The cost was terrific, the results unreliable.

Now with the evidence of greater bonanzas at deeper levels luring new millions into the district for investment, the wet mines were hoisting ten million gallons of water daily. The deeper the miners drilled, the higher the lift, and the greater the amount of these floods. Also the higher were the costs and the greater the uncertainty of being able to take out the bonanza ore, even if found.

Sutro promised to correct all this with his tunnel. He would not only drain the mines but he would ventilate them. He would not only drain and ventilate them, but he would do it without machinery, and absolutely free. His first contracts had pledged the tunnel company to that. The only money which the company was to get was two dollars a ton royalty on each ton of ore removed from the mines after the connection was completed. He would not only make possible and economical the removal of all the deep bonanzas now promised by the discovery in Crown Point, but would assure the opening of the lode to twice the depth possible without the tunnel. He would in effect establish another surface level at the tunnel level, two thousand feet below the shaft-houses in Virginia City.

It was a good argument, but the Bank of California, Sharon, Jones, Mackay, Fair and Flood ignored it. Such a development might be good for the Comstock as a whole, but it promised no immediate profit for their own pockets, and personal profit was what they desired. In the long run, if Sutro accomplished

his purpose he would also ruin the milling monopoly which was one of their great sources of income. So the powers on the Comstock remained obdurate, and Sutro carried his argument again to Congress.

Apparently he was a king of lobbyists, for on this visit to Washington he succeeded in having Congress authorize a commission to go to Nevada and report upon the entire tunnel project as an enterprise of interest to the economic welfare of the nation. The Treasury Department, if not Congress, realized that the two or three hundred millions in bullion already extracted from the Comstock lode had been of incalculable assistance to the government in preserving national credit during the financing of the Civil War debts. More specie was greatly to be desired.

The House Committee on Mines and Mining had once visited the Comstock, and though guided by Sharon and his cohorts only through such mines as he wished them to see, had been met frequently by Sutro above ground and advised of conditions which they had not seen. So they were interested, and the bill for the commission was passed. President Grant signed it. Two army engineers and a civil expert were appointed to investigate and report upon the advisability of the federal government subsidizing the tunnel projected as a development of national importance. The commissioners were Major-General H. G. Wright, Major-General John G. Foster, and Professor Wesley Newcomb, a mining engineer of note.

The government's experts journeyed at once to

Nevada. Sutro welcomed them with open arms and detailed warnings against accepting the bank's guidance in their investigation. They repulsed his advances and suggestions. They were government engineers. They knew a great deal more about mines and mining than any promoter or banker. But Sutro was accustomed to repulse, and impervious to insult. The tenacity of purpose which was perhaps his most outstanding characteristic brought him back quickly to his normal optimism. And at last, for a change, it was rewarded.

Agents appeared from some British bankers whom he had impressed with his sales talks in London. They were interested in the practical financial promise of the tunnel. They were entirely outside the influence of the Bank of California, economic, social or political. They studied the situation intensively, returned to England, reported to their principals, and Sutro was summoned by cable. He went eagerly, willing even to leave the federal engineers to the malign influence of the Bank of California. His eagerness, his enthusiasm, his intimate knowledge of the problem and his force of character proved convincing. He talked the financial powers behind the McCalmonts' bank of London into a pledge of two million, five hundred thousand dollars toward the financing of the tunnel. He returned to America with a draft for six hundred and fifty thousand dollars on New York.

The tunnel operations which had started feebly

with money subscribed by miners and a few friends, now advanced with a rush. Sutro obtained the best men, machinery and mules available in the country. He started a town, named for himself, at the mouth of the tunnel, a few miles below Virginia City.

Sharon realized that "Sutro's coyote hole," which he had opposed for years as a threat against his own power and prosperity on the Comstock had become a real menace. To be sure, it still had three and one-half miles to go, and needed perhaps three and one-half million dollars before it could start collecting royalties from his mines, and taking the ore from his mills, but it was nevertheless becoming a definite menace. It annoyed him.

But even more annoying, though somewhat compensated by the renewed prosperity which they were stimulating throughout the district, were the activities of Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien, whom Sharon was coming to consider as the immediate pretenders to his throne as king of the Comstock.

Mackay and Fair were revealing unsuspected ability as mining superintendents with extraordinary vision. And vision was what the Comstock needed—vision to see through hundreds of feet of barren porphyry into the depths of the lode where new and greater bonanzas waited. Flood and O'Brien—especially Flood—were revealing unsuspected ability as financiers, organizers and market operators. Guided by the accurate inside information supplied by Mackay and Fair, Flood and O'Brien were beating the

market regularly, providing ample funds for Mackay and Fair to continue their purchases of footage on the lode, and their exploration and development of such holdings as they controlled.

While Crown Point, owned by Jones and Hayward, leaped from \$2.00 to \$1,825 a share, Belcher, near by, controlled by the Sharon group went from \$1.50 to \$1,525. Greater production from several mines followed, and the Union Mill and Mining Company was able to keep most of its stamps crushing ore. Greater demand for mine timbers was inevitable. Whole forests on the eastern slopes of the Sierras fell before the axes of Sharon's employees, were flumed to Sharon's sawmills, cut to size for use in the mines, transported over Sharon's railroad, and sold to the developing mines.

Virginia City was upon the crest of a rising tide of silver. The columns upon columns of legal notices which had filled *The Territorial Enterprise* in 1868, '69 and '70, advertising for sale the stocks upon which owners would no longer pay assessments, gave place to advertisements of a more cheerful trend. Piper's Opera House announced new attractions dwarfing even the memory of "The Menken," who had come from the Gaïetie in Paris to take San Francisco by storm, and had done as much for Virginia City in a classical lady-godiving exhibition entitled *The Mazeppa*. The International Saloon's famous sign announcing that "Jim Gray, the Handsomest Man Living, runs this institution by day," etc.,



was faced with competition in the advertisement of

THE BLACK CROOK SALOON

(Formerly Black Crook Melodeon)

Will open this evening with a grand concert and free lunch.

Six Pretty Girls

Direct from New York by Steamer Constitution will attend the wants of customers. The Bar will be supplied with the finest Wines, Liquors and Cigars. Also in connection an Oyster Bar where will be found every luxury obtainable in this market.

Other places of public entertainment did as well. Virginia City was coming back with a rush. The city saw new possibilities of growth, prosperity and glory. Nothing should stand in its way to becoming a metropolis.

But one thing did stand in its way. Since the earliest days the problem of water supply had restricted the city's growth. The poor quality and restricted supply of water had caused illness, restricted business, increased the cost of living, and limited development. Now the growing city realized that this problem must be solved. There was an unlimited supply of pure cold mountain water in the Sierras twenty-five miles away. It must be brought to the Comstock. But how? This was many years before such engineering

feats as the Catskill aqueduct for New York and the Owens Valley aqueduct for Los Angeles had even been considered. No such problem had been attacked by a city since the days of the Roman aqueducts.

Even the ancient Romans, great builders that they were, did not have to drop their water into a valley seventeen hundred and twenty feet below Rome and raise it again to the altitude of the city. But that was Virginia City's problem. The Washoe Valley, to that depth below the level of Virginia City, lay between the town and the sources of water supply in the high Sierras. How could the water be brought across this valley?

It was not a matter of expense. Virginia City again had plenty of money to pay for whatever it wanted. The engineering problem was paramount. But the Virginia and Gold Hill Water Company had solved other problems and profited thereby. It had pierced a dozen mountains within a few miles of the town, built reservoirs, laid pipes and served its customers after a fashion. Too often, however, it had seen its potential profits cut by the necessity of putting its towns on limited rations. Now, with the towns booming and promising to double their population, the possibilities of profit were enormous if the demand could be supplied.

The company looked around, and engaged Henry Schussler, who had engineered the Spring Valley waterworks of San Francisco. Schussler examined the

tentative route from the Sierras to Mount Davidson, declared the engineering problem one of the greatest yet undertaken in hydraulics, and proceeded to undertake it. It would require an inverted siphon of pipe capable of withstanding a pressure of eight hundred pounds to the square inch.

The company ordered him to go ahead, as casually as Sharon had ordered James to build a railroad. Schussler surveyed the proposed route, and diagramed every foot of the twenty-five miles. Hobart Creek in the Sierras was to be the source of supply. An open flume could carry the water fourteen miles to a point two thousand feet above the floor of the Washoe Valley. From there it must be piped, around rocky buttes, down into steep ravines, up over cliffs, down into the depths of the Washoe Valley, and up the slope of the Washoe Mountains to Virginia and Gold Hill. With every foot of pipe specified to provide for curves, the order was given to a San Francisco foundry. The pipe was to be of cast iron for the strength and permanency necessary. The foundry estimated that a year would be required to make the thousands of variously curved molds required, and cast the pipe. And in the year it was done. The flumes were completed, the pipe was laid, and water from the Sierras flowed into Virginia City.

Two million dollars had been expended by the water company. An unprecedented engineering feat for that day had been accomplished. Virginia City and Gold Hill were saved from death by thirst. The

towns celebrated with as great a popular outpouring as they had at the hanging of John Millain.

Cannons were fired, brass bands played in the streets, fireworks blazed over the mountainside. The Comstock was proving its greatness as it proved its ability to meet emergencies. Now it had a railroad, an adequate water system and richly producing mines. It had proved superior to its hardships and its handicaps. Whatever could be done by man, the men of the Comstock would do. The days of its depression were well behind it.

But the war of the men behind this greatness was nearing a climax. As the future promised greater riches than the past, it contained the elements of more desperate conflict.

"The king is dead; long live the king," was soon to be heard through the streets of the city.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE BIG BONANZA

THE Comstock was close to its big bonanza—perhaps the greatest bonanza in all the world's history of mining. It was to produce one hundred and ninety million dollars in pure bullion, raising the valuation of two mines alone from forty thousand dollars to one hundred and sixty million dollars. It was to stimulate the whole district proportionately. It was to raise to power a new dynasty of kings of the Comstock. It was to establish fortunes and power which are still a notable influence in the world. And eventually it was to bring banks, business houses and speculators throughout the Pacific Slope crashing down in chaos with a loss of three hundred and eighty-six million dollars in three months.

Mackay and Fair in the depths of the lode, supported by Flood and O'Brien in the San Francisco mining exchange, had never for a moment wavered in their confidence that greater riches awaited them in the depths of the Comstock than had ever been seen or imagined. They had taken some money from the Kentuck and the Hale & Norcross, and had lost as much in futile prospecting in the Bullion and Savage.

The two superintendents had followed ore and country rock down every foot of the way from the surface diggings opened by O'Riley and McLaughlin in 1859, to the twelve-hundred-foot level where John P. Jones opened his Crown Point bonanza in 1871. They were intimately acquainted with every foot of many miles of underground workings. They were seeking with all their powers of mind and body to become masters of the greatest mines in the world.

The fact that Mackay had labored at four dollars a day had never dulled his mind or imagination to the stupid level of the common laborer. Even with a fortune from the Hale & Norcross in hand, a fortune which would have insured him ease and independence for life, he did not think for a moment of quitting the work. Why be satisfied with a hundred thousand dollars when a hundred million beckoned? Wealth and power, power and wealth, awaited intelligent effort. His life was centered in the Comstock, where he had toiled for more than a decade. He had become as much a part of the Comstock as its stubborn ledges. The toughness of the rock which he had drilled and blasted for years had entered into his character. This great silver lode was a foe worthy of his steel. He would conquer it. In the victory he would justify that spirit which has provided the world with gold and silver and all the useful metals since the beginning of civilization. In this attitude he was one with Fair, as they both were one with the Comstock.

Virginia City was their home. Their sole interest in life, their sole excuse for living, lay there. Fair had married Theresa Rooney in California before coming to Virginia City, but had established his first permanent home in the Comstock, where a second daughter, later to be a Vanderbilt, had been named Virginia in honor of the city. Mackay had found a wife upon the Comstock. She was Louise Hungerford Bryant, daughter of Colonel Dan Hungerford of Downieville, California, and widow of one of the pioneer physicians of Virginia City. He had met Mrs. Bryant in the boarding-house of Mrs. Moch, a kind-hearted and industrious Jewish woman who enjoyed a high place in the respect and affections of her boarders. Mrs. Bryant earned her living as a seamstress. She was a woman of charm and culture, speaking French fluently. The daughter of one pioneer, the widow of another, she understood the West. Mackay, introduced by the boarding-house keeper, found time between his long shifts in the depths of the mines to woo and win her. They were congenial souls, ambitious, intelligent, energetic, tenacious. The wife inspired and supported the rising miner even while she held him more closely bound to the Comstock.

Mackay and Fair together had found opportunity to look into other mines than their own. It was a fact which they could not justify in their knowledge of geology and practical mining that the Savage mine, which they had explored at great expense, apparently

held no ore, though it lay between their profitable Hale & Norcross and the profitable Gould & Curry which they did not own. Adjoining the Gould & Curry to the north again lay the rich two hundred and twenty-four feet of the Best & Belcher. Between that and the tremendously rich Ophir were thirteen hundred and ten feet of unproductive ground which had been owned and mined by various companies until assessments had frightened out practically all the stockholders and reduced the value of the property to a few thousand dollars.

As experts they felt that a true fissure vein such as the Comstock appeared to be could not have rich deposits of ore in the Ophir and in the Best & Belcher, and have nothing in the thirteen hundred and ten feet which lay between the two. They took Flood and O'Brien into their confidence and began secretly buying the neglected stock of the Virginia—seven hundred and ten feet adjoining Best & Belcher—and the equally despised stock of the California, which extended to the boundary of the Ophir.

Although the entire thirteen hundred and ten feet of these two properties was valued at less than forty thousand dollars when they began to buy, the stimulation of the Comstock which had started with the Crown Point bonanza, coupled with the effect of their secret buying, slowly lifted the price of the neglected property until they had paid one hundred thousand dollars for control. Then they assessed themselves more than one hundred thousand dollars, and the

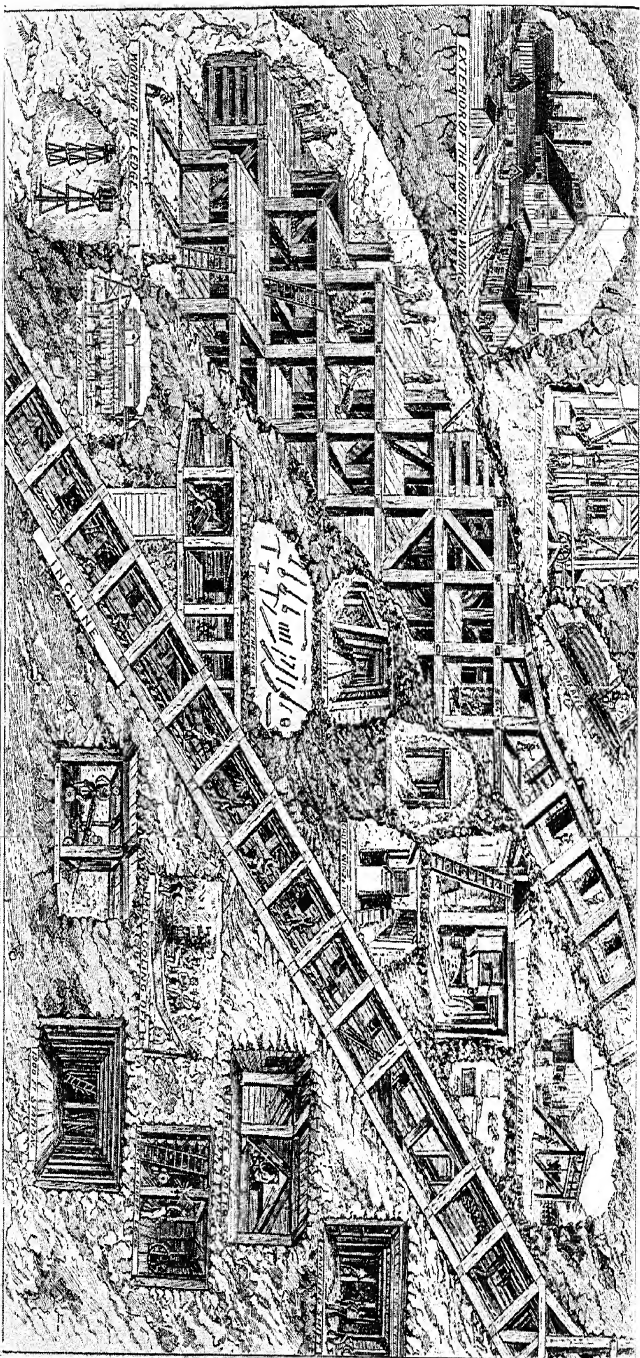


minority stockholders a proportionate amount, and proceeded to explore the neglected ground. They were confident in the belief that it must contain rich ore, as it lay between two highly profitable mines.

Fair was superintendent. A capable miner can dig quite a hole with two hundred and twelve thousand dollars, the amount which he had available from assessments. Fair did so. He sank a shaft on the property, and at the same time made arrangements to push an exploration drift from the Gould & Curry into Consolidated Virginia ground at the eleven-hundred-foot level. At last he cut a seam of rich ore less than one-eighth of an inch thick. He turned the drift immediately to follow this seam, until it pinched out. It was a bitter disappointment but Fair was superior to it. Also he had the confidence of his associates who were contributing equally with him to pay the miners, the supply bills, the hoisting charges and other costs. After a few weeks the thin seam of ore was picked up again. Fair and his miners followed it like ferrets after a rat in a pile of sacked grain, twisting and turning with every twist and turn of the ore seam.

One hundred feet inside the Consolidated Virginia ground the stringer of ore was lost again when Fair became ill and was kept out of the mine for a time. Returning, however, he picked up the trail once more. And incidentally the four associates picked up more blocks of stock which had again slumped from the momentary height gained when their control had





SECTIONAL VIEWS OF THE BELCHER MINE.

*From "The Story of the Mine," by Charles Howard Shinn.  
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Note especially the use of the square-set system of timbering whereby the miners were able to clear vast chambers of ore while at the same time the timbers propped up the mountain above the miners' heads. Without the development of this system, still in use throughout the world, the vast riches of the Comstock might never have been extracted.

been announced. The independent stockholders again were protesting against assessments.

Then the knife-blade vein widened abruptly to seven feet. The ore assayed sixty dollars a ton. At the average price of milling made possible through the railroad, water and mill improvements, this ore would return forty-five dollars a ton. Assessments were at an end. A few feet more into the vein and the ore body widened to twelve feet. Work on the shaft which had been started from above was rushed with three shifts of men. A new drift was started from the bottom of the shaft, and after two hundred and fifty feet of tunneling this drift cut the true bonanza, fifty-four feet wide at this point. The date should be historic, but no day can be named. It takes more than one day to cut through fifty-four feet of ore. But the month was March, and the year 1873.

The Consolidated Virginia began to hoist ore as soon as the mass could be blocked, measured and sampled. But it hoisted secretly through the shaft of an adjoining mine. The assays, which ranged from ninety dollars to six hundred and thirty dollars a ton, also were kept secret. The controlling owners were still busily buying all the stock available, and buying it at the lowest possible prices.

It speaks volumes for the ability of Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien as organizers and disciplinarians that even the good news leaked out slowly, and the stock did not boom. It was merely rumored in Virginia City that the Consolidated Virginia promised to

be a good mine. A score of comparatively insignificant bonanzas in earlier years had caused a hundred times the excitement. The partners were able to buy more stock at comparatively low prices. Then the directors met and increased the capital stock to one hundred and eight thousand shares of one hundred dollars par value each.

The bonanza kings were ready for their coup. Fair drove to the office of *The Territorial Enterprise* and made his announcement with dramatic indignation: "Those city papers have been abusing us long enough. I won't stand it. Where's Dan? I want him to go down to the mine. I'll show him what we're doing."

Circumstantial evidence indicates that Fair's indignation probably was entirely assumed. Although popular with his miners and the masses of Virginia City, the superintendent bore the nickname of "Slippery Jim" among the intelligentsia of the region. He was recognized as a wily operator as well as an efficient mining man. The fact that the San Francisco papers which he denounced before *The Enterprise* staff had been saying for a long time that there was no ore in the Consolidated Virginia had played into the hands of Fair and his associates so perfectly that one must doubt that it was a coincidence. It seems much more likely that such reports had been secretly promoted by Fair and his friends in order to keep prices down as long as possible while they bought the outstanding stock.

But now, with the bonanza carefully blocked out, and the assays safely in the office safe, Fair could assume indignation at the sneers of the San Francisco press, and announce the bonanza. Stock for which they had paid three and four dollars a share would then skyrocket to three and four hundred dollars.

He revealed more shrewdness and understanding of human nature in the method of his announcement. The "Dan" for whom he called to go into the mine and inspect the bonanza was Dan DeQuille, otherwise William Wright, a veteran of *The Enterprise* staff, and its best mining expert, widely known through the West for the accuracy and conservatism of his mining news. A story in *The Enterprise* signed by Dan DeQuille would be copied by most of the newspapers in the country which were interested in mining, and would be believed.

"This was before any one had definite knowledge of the strike," said the reporter afterward. "When I had been in the mine before I could not get into those drifts. Fair spoke pretty loud, as if he only wanted to shut up the city papers, but probably he had all the stock he wanted and had just got ready to tell the truth; I don't know. Anyway, I jumped up and ran when I had the word; you never saw a reporter go faster. We drove to the mine and went down to the richest place in the bonanza.

"Fair said: 'Go in and climb around. Look all you want, measure it up, make up your own mind;

I won't tell you a thing; people will say I posted you!" And so he went away. That just suited me. After I was through I went to *The Enterprise* office and wrote two articles. . . . That was the first authentic account of the big bonanza, and that was the way *The Enterprise* had a scoop."

What Dan DeQuille found, and announced in the columns of his newspaper, was a crosscut running ninety-five feet through "the finest chloride ore filled with streaks and bunches of the richest black sulphurets," such ores as his experience indicated would assay up into the thousands of dollars. The sides and top of the stope from which ore was then being removed glistened with streaks and wires of virgin silver. The extent and richness of the ore actually in sight astounded the mining reporter. He made his measurements, estimated the total value of the ore body, cut his figures in half for safety's sake, and announced to the world that there was \$116,748,000 in sight. It was the greatest mass of natural mineral wealth that had ever been disclosed to human eyes.

The year between its discovery and its announcement to the world had been used with great profit by the bonanza kings. They had taken out only enough ore to pay for their continued work of exploring and preparing the bonanza for exploitation. Not until May, 1874, did they declare their first dividend of three dollars a share. In the meantime the value of their stock had doubled, redoubled and redoubled

again, and they had continued to buy at the advancing figures as they continued to extend their underground view of the actual extent and richness of the ore body.

And now they gave the market another upward push through clever publicity. Dan DeQuille's estimate of one hundred and sixteen million dollars was encouraging, but why stop there? The West owned mining technicians whose word should have even more weight than the reporter's. Philip Deidesheimer, inventor of the square-set, former superintendent of the Ophir, and known and trusted among mining men and investors in the West for twenty years, was called in to examine the big bonanza and make a public report.

Deidesheimer spent several days in the mine and reported to the directors that there was one billion and five hundred million dollars in sight and that the Consolidated Virginia and California mines each ought to pay five thousand dollars a share under proper management. Such a statement on such authority naturally was broadcast to the world, and had its expected influence on the market. "A billion and a half dollars in two mines!" The public gasped.

Later developments were to touch that report with scandal. One authority says Deidesheimer proved his good faith by investing every cent he could raise in the mines. Another, albeit a prejudiced and angry one, ascribed the superlative optimism of the report to the fact that the engineer had been let in by Mackay,



Fair and company for several hundred shares of Consolidated Virginia at a very low price.

But the stocks were going up. Give them another boost. The director of the mint was called in to look at the bonanza. With several assistants, he climbed and measured and inspected, and announced that there was not less than three hundred million dollars in sight, and no apparent limit to the extent of the ore bodies out of sight.

Later this report also was to be touched by scandal. "Recent investigation of the official transactions of Linderman (director of the mint) has disclosed the fact that the wife of that gentleman became the owner of a large number of shares at about the time of the 'disinterested' report by her husband," an opponent of the bonanza kings announced later in a pamphlet for which he was never sued on libel charges.

To the credit of the newspaper profession, it might be noted that no scandal ever attached to the report of Dan DeQuille. Apparently all he got for his estimate of one hundred and sixteen million dollars in the big bonanza was his regular salary of fifty dollars a week. Despite his opportunity for inside and advance information he was never a stock gambler. Years later, ill and broke when *The Enterprise* finally suspended publication, he was given transportation to Florida, maintenance and a small pension by John W. Mackay, but the deed was one of pure friendship for an honest man. And incidentally, Dan DeQuille's estimate of the riches of the big bonanza was the most

accurate estimate published in advance of its actual milling.

Both the actual riches and the subsequent scandals, and all the excitement and turmoil and good and evil of the big bonanza were just beginning with its initial dividend. Forces which were to extend from the Comstock throughout the Pacific Slope, and eastward to New York and even to Europe were loosed.

Before the snow flew in the first year of discovery Consolidated Virginia was taking out two hundred tons of ore a day, and shortly shipping two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of bullion a month. The California, with six hundred feet adjoining the Consolidated Virginia, had not yet struck the bonanza, but every foot of ground advanced in the latter indicated that the rich ore extended into the California's ground. That mine was capitalized at the same figure as the other. The bonanza was cut and proved again at the fourteen-hundred- and fifteen-hundred-foot levels. California stock took its place with Consolidated Virginia stock in the high good graces of mining stock gamblers throughout the world.

They were great days on the Comstock. Virginia City was almost at the height of its glory. And circumstances were conspiring to depose the king, Sharon, who had ruled for ten hectic years.

## CHAPTER XVI

### APPROACHING A CRISIS

WHEN Adolph Sutro returned from London with six hundred and fifty thousand dollars of the McCalmonts' money, and a pledge of more, he hurled it into the work of driving his tunnel with all the pent-up energy accumulated in the eight years of his disappointments. In his eagerness to buy machinery, hire the best men available, and press the work in every possible manner, he even forgot the federal mining commission which he had left under the influence of Sharon. When he recovered from his first orgy of spending, and had perfected an organization to push the work without his immediate personal supervision, he hurried back to Washington to urge the federal subsidy when the commission's report came in.

That was in January, 1872. Snow held up the feeble train in the Rocky Mountains for days. When the tunnel builder reached the capital the report had been submitted, and the Bank of California's friends were chuckling. Sutro was amazed. The report declared the tunnel unnecessary as a means of draining and ventilating the mines of the lode. It agreed with his own promotion arguments only to the extent of saying that the mines could be worked more econo-

mically by removing waste and ore through a tunnel than by hoisting. Incidentally, it favored the tunnel also as the best means of continued exploration.

Analysis of the report revealed to Sutro that the arguments against the tunnel as a necessity for drainage and ventilation were based almost entirely upon the reports of various mine superintendents whom he knew to be under the domination of Sharon and the Bank of California. So he demanded a hearing before the Committee on Mines and Mining at which he might impeach this phase of the report. No doubt he was a lobbyist par excellence. The Grundys and the Shearers of the present day are futile amateurs by comparison.

Sutro induced the Secretary of War to call the hearing. Sharon's agents in Washington immediately reported that fact to their employer. Sharon sent the shrewdest lawyer available (Sunderland) to uphold the commissioners and harass Sutro's examination. The Bank of California also sent a dozen witnesses, including leading mining superintendents, to advise with the attorney and testify. Among them were Requa of the Chollar-Potosi, Day of the Ophir, Batterman of the Gould & Curry, and Luckhardt, the bank's confidential mining expert and investigator.

The promoter, confident of the righteousness of his cause and the evil of his enemies, rushed eagerly into the battle. Before it was finished it was to fill eight hundred and thirty-five printed pages of testimony in a government report. Aside from its

technicalities it furnishes reading matter almost as engrossing as a popular murder trial. Sutro tied up the government experts, and the monopoly's hirelings alike in hard knots. He made them contradict their testimony, impeach their records, and resort again and again to the "I don't remember," and "I can not recall," of witnesses sinking in their own words.

And Sutro, single-handed, won the battle against the federal commission and all the expert mining and legal forces provided by the Bank of California. When the hearing was finished the House Committee on Mines and Mining in effect brushed aside the findings of the commission and based its action upon the arguments of the promoter. It believed one man against a dozen. And it recommended to Congress a bill for a loan of two million dollars to the Sutro Tunnel Company.

It was a simple task then to get another advance of eight hundred and fifty thousand dollars from the McCalmont bank to prosecute the work of tunnel building while Congress was getting around to vote upon the subsidy. The tunnel was now in the mountain nearly two thousand feet. The promoter carried the new financial munitions into his war against the stubborn rock. His enemies were impressed more than his friends. "That German Jew will undermine the Comstock," they said. And toward the undermining of the Comstock he devoted his great energies, though not in the manner his enemies had meant.

The town of Sutro grew to nearly a thousand population. Four hundred miners were employed in the tunnel and its shafts. Many had wives and children. Schools, a church, a newspaper, stores and saloons were started. Scores of machinists, blacksmiths, carpenters, mule-drivers and roustabouts were there. It was a thriving town, a town eager for its work, a town with a large pay-roll.

Then came the opening of the Consolidated Virginia bonanza, and the continued prosperity of the Crown Point bonanza had a rival in the stimulation of Virginia City. The activities of Sutro driving into the mountain, and of Mackay, Fair, Jones and Sharon to strip the lode of its wealth before Sutro could begin to charge them two dollars on each ton of ore removed, took on the character of a race. It was a race for a prize of millions of dollars. And aside from the millions of dollars which were being expended to win tens of millions, the contest took on the character of a sporting event of titanic proportions.

The entire Pacific slope thrilled to the tension of the struggle. The gamblers on the mining stock exchanges in effect bet millions upon the outcome. Even without such financial and sporting-news pages as we know to-day, and more than half a century before the radio would keep the world informed play by play of the classic struggles of Notre Dame and U. S. C., or the world series between Chicago and Philadelphia, this contest in the depths of Nevada's desert mountains was recognized and followed

eagerly, alike by the bankers of New York and London and the bartenders of San Francisco.

Several thousand athletes, stripped to the waist, glistening with sweat, pale but skilful from years of training in subterranean caverns, sped downward through the lode. Several hundred, equally strong and skilful, bored inward through the base of the mountain. The fact that they did not recognize each other as athletes, but spoke contemptuously of their rivals as muckers and powder monkeys when they did not identify them as Dagos or Micks or Cousin Jacks, did not change the situation. They were rivals, struggling toward a single goal—the point below the bonanzas where the tunnel would cut the lode.

The fact that they were athletes, though unappreciated by them, is proved by their physical accomplishments. Men who can literally hold up a mountain while tearing out its foundation must rival even the mythical Hercules in any imagination. Records of their accomplishments are still available.

The men in shafts, drifts, stopes and tunnel alike labored in withering heat. They saw the weight of the mountain come down upon them, crushing their braces of twelve-inch-square timbers like matchwood. They dug out the fallen rocks, inserting new timbers as they dug, held up the mountain and pressed on into its depths. They saw the very floor rise under their feet, squeezed upward by surrounding pressure as the inside of a baked potato squeezes upward under the hand of a skilled waiter. They cut the rising floor

away again and again, relaid the rails of their dump-car lines and filled the cars with rock.

Muckers with the physique of Olympic discus-throwers hurled the hot rocks into the waiting cars, drove the mules away from the air pipes with whip and club, and hurried the waste to the outer dumps. Drillers sank their steel into the rock more swiftly than drills had ever been sunk by hand power. Powder men filled and tamped the holes and cut their fuses short to the danger point in order to lose as little time as possible.

Illustrative was the experience of four men in the bottom of the Ophir shaft. They had drilled and charged four holes and cut the fuses short. Then they signaled for the cage. When it came down to lift them to a point of safety, they lighted the fuses, scrambled on to the cage, and signaled for the rise. The cage did not move. Frantically they signaled again. Still it did not move. The fuses were spitting fire under their feet, and in desperation the men sprang to tear them from their tamped holes. But the short fuses had already burned into the rock beyond their reach. The four men attempted to climb the timbered sides of the shaft. They had gone but a few feet when the explosion occurred. One man was killed. The others escaped by a miracle. Scores of somewhat similar accidents were recorded in the mines and in the tunnel. The workers merely carried out their dead or injured comrades, hurried back to their jobs, and continued to cut their fuses short.



But hand drilling was too slow. Fuse firing was too unreliable. Expense was of no consideration if speed could be increased. Compressed air drills were introduced into the working of mines and tunnel, and though erratic and expensive proved far more efficient than hand-driven drills. Electric devices were tried at some of the headings to fire the blasts. But this machinery also was new to the time and was out of order all too frequently. The time, it must be remembered, was nearly sixty years ago. Edison had not even conceived his invention of the incandescent electric light. Still the new drilling and blasting equipment was an improvement over the old.

Sutro engaged Carl O. Wederkinch, superintendent of the recently completed Hoosac tunnel in Massachusetts, with his most expert helpers, and the best Burleigh drills then obtainable. Work in the tunnel speeded up. Work continued more rapidly on the four shafts which he was sinking on the line to ventilate the tunnel and provide new headings at which work could be prosecuted in both directions.

"Faster! Faster!" Sutro cried to his miners and shift bosses. "Every ton of ore being taken from the bonanzas loses our company two dollars."

"Faster! Faster!" Mackay, Fair, Jones and Sharon cried to the superintendents of their mines. "The national financial panic (of 1873) has increased the value of bullion. Get it out while the price is high."

The mines still refused to recognize Sutro as a contender for the dictatorship of the Comstock. The

actual battle for leadership was still between Sharon on the one hand and the rising bonanza kings, Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien, on the other. John P. Jones was merely an independent, rich and powerful in his own right by reason of control of the Crown Point bonanza, but more or less indifferent to the others. Also Jones had broadened his interests rather than concentrated them by being elected to the United States Senate, where William M. Stewart had already succeeded in impressing the importance of Nevada and its riches upon the government.

So business moved into the year 1874. Virginia City probably was the most prosperous town of its size in the world. The panic which had shaken the economic structure of the United States to its foundations in the preceding year had but served to settle and solidify the bullion resources of the Comstock. Nevada literally manufactured its own money. The government had established a mint at Carson City. Ore which lay in the depths of the mountain on one day could be circulating as coined silver in the town a week later. Depreciation in the value of paper currency, or credit, could not hurt the district. On the contrary the troubles of the rest of the country stimulated the mines, and raised the state to unexpected and perhaps unjustified influence in national affairs.

Sharon decided that he must take advantage of this situation. The Bank of California had almost lost its financial ascendancy because the big bonanza group

was actually producing more money than the bank group. If the bank syndicate wished to maintain its paramount power without financial control, it must do so by other methods. So Sharon announced himself as a candidate for the United States Senate. There were honor and potential power in the post. Incidentally there would be opportunity to strike another blow at Adolph Sutro and his tunnel by working and voting against the two-million-dollar subsidy which had been recommended to Congress.

Sutro recognized that possibility and that potential threat. Also, he was thoroughly convinced by this time that Sharon was an unmitigated evil genius whose influence in any position could be only for the worst. Therefore Sutro also announced himself as an independent candidate for the Senate.

That was many years before the direct election of United States Senators. The office was filled by the votes of the legislature. The primary contest then was in the election of the legislators. It was a heated campaign.

Election methods in Virginia City did not differ greatly in that day from those most effective in New York, where Boss Tweed had recently been deposed from the peak of power which first made Tammany Hall famous and infamous. Venal politicians could always be found to do the dirty work of the bosses. Cowardly ward heelers could always be found to intimidate cowardly voters.

Dan DeQuille has left us an amusing illustration

of the popular conception of politics in the campaign of John P. Jones. During his campaign Jones and several friends were chatting and "sipping their wine" in a barroom when a bullet-headed, long-armed, tough and ugly ruffian lounged in and asked the mining magnate for a few minutes of his time. Jones, always democratic, allowed himself to be led to a back room.

"Mr. Jones, sir, you don't know me," said the intruder, "but when you lived in old Tuolumne, I war also in that part of Californy. Mr. Jones, I'm the Taranteler of Calaveras; I'm the war-hoss of the hills and a fighter from hell! I'm here to tell you, you are goin' into this here contest, an' it's liable to be a pretty lively one. About 'lection day it'll be all-fired hot. Now what you'll need will be a good fighter; a feller to stand up, knock down, and drag out for you; a man who can go to the polls and knock down right and left—wade through everything!"

Jones was amused but polite, and asked the price of such services.

"I couldn't undertake the job short of a thousand dollars. Thar's a terrible rough set over here. These Washoe fellers are nearly hell themselves, and they are more on the cut and shoot than is healthy. I'm liable to be chopped all to pieces, riddled with bullets and either killed outright or crippled for life."

Jones, who had a keen sense of humor, appeared to deliberate. "If I am to have a fighter, I want the best," he said. "I don't want a fellow that will be

kicked and cuffed around town by every bummer." The remark had its desired effect. The man struck a menacing pose.

"Will anybody kick and cuff me?" he demanded. "Me, the war-hoss of the hills; the Taranteler of Calaveras? Not much!"

"Show me," said Jones. "I have another man in my eye. It lies between the pair of you. The best man is the man for my money."

"Damn your man! Bring him on. Damn me, I'll devour him! Show him to the Taranteler!"

Before leaving the barroom Jones had seen there a man named James N. Cartter, widely known on the Pacific Coast as Big Jim Cartter. He stepped out and told Cartter the situation, and the latter promptly fell in with the joke.

"So this is the lop-eared cur of Calaveras who comes here to set up as a fighter?" said Cartter, displaying a sixteen-inch bowie-knife on one hip and a revolver on the other as he started to twist out of his coat.

"Mr. Jones," cried the war-hoss of the hills, "this man is a friend of yours. I can't fight a friend of yours. With any friend of yours I'm a lamb. I could not harm a hair of his head."

"No friend at all. He is a fighter like yourself. If you whip him I hire you as my fighter. That's all."

"I can't fight in a room," said the Taranteler. "I have never yet had a fight in a room. I don't like it."

"It is rather close," said Jones, and handed the man a twenty-dollar gold piece. "Take this. I hire you

for my open-air fighter. You are never to fight for me except in the open air where there is a good chance for you to run."

"Thank you, Mr. Jones," said the "war-hoss," and made for the door. There he turned. "It's all very nice, Mr. Jones, but that is either Jim Cartter or the devil, and you can't ring him in on me."

Jones capitalized such stories as that in his campaign. He was popular with all classes in the Comstock district, and won his election in a walk. Not so Sharon. He was cold, hard, efficient, successful in business, but never popular.

Sharon's enemies asserted that the election cost the banker half a million dollars. The charge was never proved. Certainly the job would have been worth that much to a man of Sharon's ambition and wealth. All the newspapers in Nevada, with the single exception of the frankly subsidized *Independent* published in the town of Sutro, supported the banker. Incidentally they flayed Sutro without mercy.

Representative of their attitude was an editorial in *The Alta California*, that state's leading newspaper. *The Alta* had been advised that Congress was about to act upon the two-million-dollar subsidy for the tunnel company. Here was an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone—to attack Sutro and his tunnel project, and at the same time improve its own standing with the powerful Bank of California by assisting the Virginia City executive to his desired place in the senate.

"We are accustomed to the introduction of outrageous schemes of plunder in our legislatures, but we are not yet reconciled to the favor shown them," said the newspaper. "One of the worst in our official records is the Sutro Tunnel Bill. . . . At the rate of progress made in the last ten years he would finish it in about two centuries; but if Congress will assist him unscrupulously in his plunder scheme, he may live to enjoy the honor and fame of being the founder and finisher of one of the most disgraceful enterprises in the United States."

The same thought was echoed in virtually every newspaper in Nevada and northern California. And Sharon was elected to the United States Senate. The Bank of California's political power was consolidated as its financial power had been. Then Congress rejected the mining committee's bill for the two-million-dollar loan to the tunnel company.

Immediately all the important powers in the Comstock formed a tentative organization for the purpose of ridding themselves permanently of the tunnel threat to undermine their control of the lode.

Sharon recognized the importance of Mackay, Fair and Flood in one group and of Jones and Hayward in another. The mines which they controlled, together with the mines ruled by the bank ring represented at least nine-tenths of the resources of the district. The three groups combined for the purpose of battle, and sued to abrogate all contracts between the Sutro

Tunnel Company and the various mines, on the ground that the company had not fulfilled its technical obligations in point of time.

Sutro was groggy from his overwhelming defeat in the senatorial campaign and from his latest disappointment in Washington, but he still enjoyed the confidence of the McCalmonts, and had access to their bank resources. He was able to fight, and he did fight.



## CHAPTER XVII

### "THE KING IS DEAD; LONG LIVE THE KING!"

THE Consolidated Virginia and the California mines were now producing more millions than the entire district had been producing in the past. Consolidated Virginia shares rose to six hundred and ten dollars and shares in the California to seven hundred and eighty dollars. The stock valuation of these two mines alone reached one hundred and sixty million dollars. There was not enough gold west of the Hudson River to buy the mines at the top price. But the mines were not for sale. Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien were paying themselves more than one million dollars a month in dividends. They insisted they were not interested in the stock-market. But others were.

"Never before in all the mining excitements of the Pacific Coast did such demoralization seize upon the community," said one contemporaneous writer in San Francisco. "Bankers, retired capitalists, manufacturers, merchants, shopkeepers, clerks, farmers, mechanics, hodcarriers, servant men and servant women, clergymen, lawyers, doctors, wives and widows poured in their orders for the purchase of bonanza stocks. . . . Capital was withdrawn from all

the varied industries of the country. . . . Real estate was sold or mortgaged to procure the coin that could be invested with prospects of such immense returns."

That was the big bonanza. The excitement spread from Virginia City to San Francisco, to New York, to London. Even the canny Scotch McCalmonts continued to provide Adolph Sutro with funds in the belief that his tunnel eventually would control this output of scores of millions.

It was a period of extravagance and folly throughout the country. The national panic had been weathered. President Grant was nearing the end of his second term, to which he had been elected against the opposition of Horace Greeley. High tariff and low morals had stimulated industry and corruption alike throughout the land. The mad speculation and extravagance of the Comstock district and San Francisco were in a popular spirit.

The two big bonanza mines alone were returning two million dollars' worth of bullion each month. The Crown Point was producing richly. The various mines controlled by the Bank of California syndicate were doing well. The mills owned by the syndicate, the private mill of Jones and Hayward, and the mills constructed or purchased by the new bonanza kings to handle their own ore, were all reaping their share of the enormous profits. The transportation and timber monopoly were doing equally well.

Champagne, caviar, truffles, and oysters and lob-

sters brought all the way from the Atlantic on ice were on the regular menu at the International Hotel in Virginia City, where the wealthiest citizens had been happy to get beans and bacon a few years earlier. Similar conditions were in evidence in San Francisco.

William C. Ralston, cashier and leading director of the Bank of California, and first sponsor of William Sharon on the Comstock, entered upon such an orgy of promotional spending as a Solomon or a Cæsar might have envied. Among other things he promoted the Palace Hotel, which eventually was to cost six million dollars—a tremendous sum for a hotel more than half a century ago. It was to be the most magnificent hostelry on earth. No furnishings were available good enough for Ralston's idea, so he promoted a factory to make them. He promoted ferry lines, and innumerable other developments which brought to the city its share of the Comstock millions. He built a palace for himself in the midst of a magnificent private park at Belmont on the San Francisco peninsula. Other multimillionaires of the day followed his example. Luxury and extravagance ruled the Pacific Slope, and that at the time when Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse were leading the Sioux warriors in the great insurrection which was to culminate in the Custer massacre.

In this situation the price of shares in the Comstock mines had risen to such a point that few buyers could finance outright purchases. They began to learn the technique of margins. Every one who could



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ON THE WAY TO THE MINE.



raise a hundred dollars bet it on the Comstock. A new exchange, the third, had to be organized in San Francisco to handle the tremendous business.

The situation in the West was similar to the national bull market which came to its peak in the autumn of 1929. The market was overbalanced. There were no available cash resources in the West to support it in emergency. So when "bears" managed to circulate a rumor that the big bonanza was exhausted, panic seized the Pacific Slope. Consolidated Virginia dropped two hundred dollars a share in one week. California lost sixty per cent. of its entire market valuation. The market price of the two companies dropped twenty-four million dollars.

All the business of the Comstock staggered for a moment under the blow. The Bank of California mines were hard hit, but the syndicate's control of mines and mills and railroad survived. Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien appeared to be untouched. "It is no affair of mine," said Mackay for publication. "I am not speculating in stocks. My business is mining—legitimate mining. I see that my men do their work properly in the mines and that all goes as it should in the mills. I make my money here out of the ore."

Probably that was true at the moment. The big bonanza was enough to keep any four men busy and contented. But the statement reveals a somewhat hypocritical smugness when we recall that Mackay's and his associates' superior position had been gained

largely through that same stock speculation to which he now referred with such contempt.

In any event, it was a fact that the big bonanza firm was not injured by the panic. Probably Mackay's contempt for the stock speculators did not influence his own action when the brief panic cut prices once more to a profitable purchase point. Knowing what the world knows of the bonanza kings, it seems more than probable that they seized this opportunity to buy even a larger share of Consolidated Virginia and California at the new bargain quotations.

In 1875 the market recovered steadily. Still the bullion production of the Comstock increased, and popular confidence mounted again with the dividend reports. By summer, prices were well up. And then again came rumors of the exhaustion of the big bonanza. Once more prices crashed on the exchanges. Comstock securities lost a total of sixty million dollars in a few days.

And this time the Bank of California did not survive. It went down in the crash just as the cigar salesmen, haberdashers, cooks and laundresses went down. The bank which had been the greatest financial power on the Pacific Coast for more than a decade closed its doors. Failure after failure followed, throughout Nevada and California. Hundreds of businesses and individual depositors were ruined.

Even Ralston's fame, and the extraordinary confidence in which he was held throughout the West could not save the day. Once before he had stopped

a threatening run on the bank by borrowing one million dollars in gold coin from the mint in San Francisco and stacking it up in the windows of the bank. Now a million dollars was nothing. But knowing the confidence in which he was held by rich and poor alike, Ralston stood on the steps of the bank and assured the frantic throngs that the concern's resources were sufficient to meet all liabilities. He pledged his private fortune to protect the depositors. The crowd believed him and dispersed.

When the directors met on Friday, August 27, 1875, Ralston was not allowed to be present. A hasty check of the books had indicated that he was short one million and five hundred thousand dollars in his cash. D. O. Mills, president of the bank, came from the meeting and demanded Ralston's resignation. Ralston signed on the dotted line. Two hours later his body was found floating off North Beach, where he had long been accustomed to swim. The bath-house keeper said he had appeared, overheated from a long walk, gone into the water immediately, and drowned when stricken by cramps. Others, ruined by the bank's failure, insisted he had committed suicide.

It was Black Friday in the history of California. The depositors and business men throughout the West gave up hope at the news of Ralston's dismissal and sudden death. The man to whom they had looked as the greatest constructive power on the Coast had failed them. They could trust no one. Then came



the news that Ralston's unsecured liabilities totaled \$4,655,973.

All the subsidiary interests of the Bank of California staggered under the blow, and most of them fell. The monopoly's grip on the Comstock, omnipotent for more than a decade, was broken by the ensuing forced liquidation.

Sharon finally succeeded in reorganizing and re-opening the bank with subscriptions of one million dollars from himself, D. O. Mills, and others of the directorate. The bank met its obligations, but to do so it was obliged to liquidate many of its holdings in the Comstock and elsewhere. As king of the Comstock, Sharon was dead. The Sharon dynasty had followed the Old Virginia-Comstock dynasty into the shadows.

"Long live the king!" The Mackay-Fair-Flood-O'Brien group had been waiting at the palace gates. No sooner had Sharon been deposed than the new bonanza kings marched into the throne room. However much Mackay may have scorned the stock-market, he did not scorn opportunity. Neither did his associates. Flood had developed a genius for organization, finance and executive control as great as the genius of Mackay and Fair for constructive mining.

The group organized the Nevada Bank of San Francisco. They had millions in cash. The forced liquidation of the Bank of California's assets was their opportunity. They did not hesitate. They did not

overlook one tiny ramification of the former monopoly's holdings. By the time Sharon was able to extract himself from the chaos brought on by Ralston's overreaching in the promotion of San Francisco, the new bonanza kings were seated even more firmly in control of the Comstock than Sharon had ever been.

The sworn testimony of James C. Flood in a suit to set aside a fraudulent mining deed is startling in its revelation of their power:

Q.—Who are the owners of the Pacific Mill and Mining Company?

A.—Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien are the principal stockholders.

Q.—Who are the owners of the Pacific Wood, Lumber and Flume Company?

A.—Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien are the principal stockholders.

Q.—Who are the owners of the Virginia and Gold Hill Water Company?

A.—The principal stockholders are Mackay, Fair, Flood, O'Brien, W. S. Hobart, John Skae and others.

Q.—Is there any other corporation from which the company draws supplies of any character of which Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien are not the trustees and principal owners?

A.—I don't know of any.

It seems clear that the new bonanza kings had

seized the Bank of California's monopoly and expanded it with a vengeance. To the rank and file of Virginia City the change made little difference. Indeed they could see and feel no change. The mines were just as hot, the air just as foul, the mules as stubborn, the wages the same under four masters as under one. The fire which swept the town in that year burned just as hotly as the fire which had swept the Yellow Jacket, Kentuck and Crown Point mines in an earlier year under the Sharon dynasty.

A drunken man attempting to light his pipe from a kerosene lamp in a lodging-house, upset the lamp. In a moment the flimsy walls, dried to tinder by the desert sun and wind, were in flames. As usual, a Washoe zephyr was blowing.

The cry of "fire" swept the town. The fire itself spread almost as rapidly. The triangle in front of the Virginia Engine Company house sounded its call. The four other fire companies in the town responded with speed. The light blue coats and pearl buttons which had graced the funeral cortège of the murdered Julia Bulette were forgotten. Here was work.

Flames were sweeping from frame building to frame building almost as swiftly as a man could run. The firemen struggled in vain. Gold Hill poured its hose carts and pumps over the narrow divide into the streets of Virginia City. But the flames roared on, while women and children wrung their hands and screamed as their homes vanished in bursts of flame which had almost the force of explosions. Then the

city actually rocked to a real explosion. A magazine near one of the shafts had been ignited.

The firemen became more cautious. The flames gained headway. A hundred houses had burned in half an hour. Two hundred more burned in another half-hour. A thousand burned in the next hour, while giant powder tore shaft-houses to pieces in half a dozen places, and the helpless, homeless people of the town flocked away from the inferno, up the steep slopes of Mount Davidson, down into the narrow valley below, over the ridge to Gold Hill and Gold Canyon, carrying what pitiful possessions they had been able to snatch from the devouring flames.

Flaming brands, carried by the wind or thrown by the explosions of stored dynamite, leaped across the lines of fighting firemen and set a blaze to houses a block or more away. Again and again groups of men were trapped by the flames on every side and literally fought their way out of the furnace.

The shaft-houses and hoisting works of the various mines within the city were among the most costly and important buildings, and the struggle soon centered about these works. There were hundreds of men available who were skilled in the use of dynamite. These men under the direction of the mine superintendents blasted away all near-by buildings in frantic effort to save the mine works. The roar of these blasts mingled with the roar of unpremeditated explosions. The city and the mountain shook with the recurring concussions.

The flame and smoke could be seen and the uproar heard fifteen miles away in the Carson Valley. Business houses, residences, public buildings, lumber yards, hotels, churches and schools added their fuel to the fire. At the Ophir shaft one thousand cords of wood and four hundred thousand feet of mine timbers caught and burned. So terrific was the heat in the supply yard of the Ophir that a pile of car wheels was fused into a solid mass of iron.

No human effort could be maintained against such odds. The blaze drove back firemen and dynamiters alike, and leaped the spaces left by the razed buildings to seize upon shaft-houses, offices, supply rooms and hoisting works of the mines. Not only the houses and possessions of the people but the jobs from which they might hope to regain some of their losses appeared to be going up in the billows of lurid smoke.

To add to the panic, rumor spread that the fire had descended into the mines. It was, in fact, burning four hundred feet down the Ophir shaft. The horror of the Yellow Jacket fire was still fresh in the minds of the people. The families of the miners were torn between the fear of losing possessions and even life in the burning of their homes, and the fear of losing husband and father in the burning of the mines. The crowds surged back and forth between the burning city and the burning shaft-houses. On the one hand they risked death in the trap of the flames which leaped from house to house with lightning speed. On the other they risked death in the explosions of stored

dynamite and caps near the hoisting works. Probably no such frantic pandemonium has ever accompanied the burning of a city.

The slow and steady destruction of San Francisco over a period of three days in 1906 must have been an orderly and unexciting affair compared with it. Perhaps the early fires which devastated the San Francisco of the 'fifties when it was a city of frame shacks were more similar.

Runners from the mines, however, soon informed the milling crowds that the blaze had been checked at the surface of most of the shafts and subdued in those which it had entered. Every miner had been brought to the surface and held under guard until his name was checked. Then the great doors had been dropped to close the shafts, and covered with several feet of wet sand to shut out the fire. The mines and the men were saved. The refugees took what comfort they could from that.

The city was in ruins. Two thousand out of its three thousand structures lay in smoking ashes when the blaze had burned itself out. More than two-thirds of its people were homeless. Hundreds had been more or less severely burned or otherwise injured in their frantic efforts to save themselves and their household goods. But the third who had escaped the holocaust turned energetically to the work of rehabilitation. Every remaining building in Virginia City housed double its normal quota. Gold Hill, only a mile away, but saved from destruction by the inter-

vening ridge, opened its homes and public buildings. Silver City, the little town down the canyon, tripled its population in an hour. Dayton, on the Carson River, provided a refuge for hundreds. Carson City opened its homes to the homeless and fed the hungry. Even the little town of Sutro at the mouth of the tunnel took them in and made them welcome.

Commenting upon the situation the day after the fire, *The Territorial Enterprise*, printing with type borrowed from a Gold Hill contemporary, said:

"People wandered through the débris of Virginia City yesterday with such a look on their faces as men and women wear when they gather around the coffin to look upon one who in life was very dear, but who is gone forever. It was a look simply at the remains. Probably the burning over of no other half-mile square in the world would have inflicted so much misery, near and remote, as the half-mile square which has been swept by fire here.

"In most places the ruins are still too hot to admit of any attempt at rebuilding, but here and there lumber is being unloaded, and no doubt within a day or two the sound of hammer and saw will be continuous. In this connection we trust the authorities will not delay ordering a new survey of the city that uniform grades may be established, streets straightened and widened where possible, and boundaries definitely decided. . . .

"No estimate can yet be made of the extent of the

damage to the boilers and heavy engines of the mills and hoisting works. . . . Next to the homeless ones, the burnt machinery of the different hoisting works is the most pitiable sight to be seen amid the universal wreck. They are but scarred and shapeless ruins now. But three days ago they were Titans, so radiant with movement and strength that they seemed almost alive. . . .

"We have not seen a business man who is not determined to resume as soon as a tent can be pitched."

And resume they did. Before the ashes were cold, new houses began to spring up on the sites of the old. The spirit which had made Virginia City and carried it from bonanza through borrasca and into bonanza again was a spirit which could not be destroyed by fire. Carloads of food, blankets, medicines, and other emergency supplies were started from San Francisco while the embers of the city were still steaming under the hose of the exhausted firemen. Relief committees were organized in a dozen towns and cities. Trainloads of lumber and brick were rushed to the scene. The rebuilding was almost as spectacular as the fire.

Superintendents of the most seriously damaged mines wired for new machinery and supplies. By the time the new hoisting engines, pumps and other apparatus were received, new shaft-houses were in place with gallows-frames designed on more modern lines to carry the equipment. Gas lights were raised high



throughout the ruined area so that work could be rushed by night as well as by day. The hundreds of men whose jobs had been cut off by the destruction of the surface works of the mines were given employment in the burned district. Timbermen from the closed mines became carpenters on the surface.

And a week later, a Washoe zephyr, grown to the violence of the historic wind which once wafted a kicking burro over the pioneer camp of Virginia, struck the rising city and leveled it again. The Comstockers merely shook their heads stubbornly, picked up their scattered lumber and returned to their work of rebuilding.

The Chollar-Potosi, Hale & Norcross and Savage mines had been fortunate. Shortly before the fire they had opened a combination shaft, and had ordered a double-reel hoisting engine, the finest thing of its kind in the district. The engine arrived only a few days after the fire. In the meantime the old foundations had been dismantled, new ones laid, and a shaft-house erected. The new engine was installed quickly, and work in these mines was resumed only thirty days after the fire.

Consolidated Virginia and California, the two big bonanza mines, had lost buildings, equipment and supplies valued at one million, four hundred and sixty-one thousand dollars. They replaced the losses with new and improved buildings and machinery, and resumed operations fifty days after the fire. They did not miss a dividend.

Within two months the city had been rebuilt. The population was housed more comfortably than before. A supplementary water system and storage reservoir for eight million, three hundred thousand gallons was developed and four miles of fire pipe lines were laid. A loss of ten million dollars had been written off.

Incidentally, a new enemy had been made who was to cause the bonanza kings much grief and embarrassment over a period of several years, giving them a sort of publicity which only consciences toughened by the consciousness of a million dollars a month income could have defied. Due directly to this fire we have legal and journalistic records still available which reveal a remarkably seamy side of the big bonanza.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

THE Virginia City fire had caused a property loss of ten million dollars. But the Comstock could better afford to write off a loss of ten millions in the year 1875 than in any other year of its history. The new kings—Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien—in that year milled twenty-five million dollars' worth of ore from their Consolidated Virginia and California mines alone. The nation had almost recovered from the panic of 'seventy-three. Despite the failure of the Bank of California and the attendant business failures throughout the state, the financial situation on the Pacific Slope was sound.

In any survey of the economic situation in the West of that day it is necessary to consider western Nevada and central California, and especially Virginia City and San Francisco as a unit. Although the two cities were three hundred miles apart, their business relations were so intimate that whatever touched one was felt immediately in the other. All the big mining and milling companies of Virginia City had their main business offices in San Francisco. The leading business men almost commuted between the two cities. Much of the profits of the Comstock were deposited or invested in California.

And California was without a rival in the broad distribution of its wealth. One out of every thirteen persons in San Francisco owned real estate. Savings-bank deposits in California in that year totaled seventy-five million dollars, for a total state population of less than one million. San Francisco boasted two hundred and fifty thousand population. Los Angeles was smaller than Virginia City. All business was flourishing. The economic situation was excellent.

So the bonanza kings and Virginia City in general met their losses easily and proceeded to greater gains. Sharon had taken a back seat, comforted by some fifteen million dollars in his personal estate, by his political position as a United States Senator, and by his social position as host in the most palatial residence and most extravagant private park in the West—the former home of W. C. Ralston at Belmont on the San Francisco peninsula, taken over after the bank crash.

Fair was planning a mansion on Nob Hill in San Francisco which should be worthy of his name, fame, fortune, and the social ambitions of his family. Mackay had set up a magnificent establishment in London and another in Paris, where Mrs. Mackay, charming, accomplished and rich beyond the imagination of the Europeans, was becoming a leader of titled society. Flood was contenting himself with power and a magnificent home in Menlo Park, on the peninsula. O'Brien, still the genial and convivial Irish saloon-keeper despite his millions, was satisfied

to spend his afternoons in the back room of McGovern's saloon on the site of the present Chronicle Building in San Francisco. There he played pedro and drank with his cronies. Always at his elbow was a stack of silver dollars from which his less fortunate old friends were always free to help themselves.

Those were pleasant days for the Comstockers. But trouble was brewing. Squire P. Dewey, a prominent capitalist and mining man of San Francisco, with considerable investments in the two big bonanza mines, had gone to Fair immediately after the big fire at Virginia City and sought information upon which to base his operations in the stock-market. And Dewey had lost a fortune as a result. He attributed this loss to false information maliciously conveyed by Fair. Promptly and loudly, he swore vengeance. The bonanza kings merely shrugged their shoulders. They had the money and the power. Also, there was a more serious threat against their ascendancy, which needed to be taken care of.

Adolph Sutro, who had fought Sharon and the Bank of California with every weapon upon which he could lay his hands for ten weary years, was assuming more menacing proportions. Sharon, the bank, and the rising powers of the Comstock had generally been too busy, too concerned with making money, to take him very seriously. But they had always been aware of his presence, buzzing, threatening, stabbing like an angry hornet. They had slapped at him subconsciously when they were more occupied with other

affairs. Occasionally they had injured him and driven him away. But always he had returned. At times his persistence had seemed a real danger, and they had taken time and made a real effort to crush him. In vain. Always and incessantly, when more important things did not occupy them, the Sharon monopolists had found Sutro on their necks.

Now, since Sharon had been deposed from the throne, the new kings were aware of the menace. They too tried first to ignore him and then to wither him with contempt. Fair commented: "Poor old Sutro. He's working away at his tunnel boring the earth, and boring public men in Washington. He's a man of very little weight. If two Congressmen happen to be talking in the street in Washington, and they see Sutro coming, they'll quietly turn their backs so as not to see him, but he doesn't care for that; he just walks up and commences on them about his tunnel. Well, I'd like to see the tunnel go through. It would be a good thing for us, I think."

But this pose of tolerant contempt was only a pose. The bonanza firm soon realized the force of Sutro's character and the potential menace of the tunnel. If their bonanzas were as great as they had led the public to believe, they would reach far below the two-thousand-foot level at which the tunnel was aiming to cut the lode. Then they would not only have to pay Sutro two dollars royalty per ton on each of their hundreds of thousands of tons of ore, but would be likely to lose much of their milling monopoly business

to the more convenient and modern mills which Sutro was planning to build at the mouth of the tunnel. They might even lose their strangle hold upon the Comstock. At least the tunnel was likely to reveal the exact situation and value of their mines at the deeper level, and would therefore end the stock fluctuations which were such a valuable source of income for those who knew the inside of the mines.

So the bonanza firm recognized the menace as well as the irritation of Sutro's activities, and pressed their suits and legislation to thwart the tunnel builder. At the same time the race between the tunnelers and the miners continued unabated.

Mackay and Fair explained that speed was necessary both for safety and for profits. The bonanza ore must be hoisted before some physical disaster could wreck the mines. The hot clay, rock and ore seethed and bulged as the miners sweated in drift and stope. Foul air and moisture were destroying the forests of timbers in the workings. A fire would result in caves and slides which might close the mines for years, if not for ever. Every ton of bonanza ore hoisted was just one more ton snatched from beneath a tottering deadfall.

A situation developed worthy the attention of an Edward Gibbon and a John Stuart Mill combined. While bullion was pouring out of the Comstock mills in a silver stream more than equal in value annually to all the money in circulation west of the Mississippi River, an economic situation was being promoted

which threatened to ruin the business of the Pacific Slope. Concentrated in Virginia City and in San Francisco, tragic forces were developing. They were economic and moral forces far beyond the ability of any human being to control.

Any student of economics in the light of history who wishes to understand the collapse of the world's greatest empire through five centuries of demoralization, may find the essential forces concentrated in clear miniature in the little mining city of the Comstock. Instead of an empire reaching from the North Sea to the Indian Ocean, he need consider only the limited territory of western Nevada and central California. Instead of extending his research through five centuries, he may confine it within five years.

Economic and human forces are little changed. As Gibbon reveals in history, and such authorities as Lauderdale and Rae emphasize in economics, the concentration of private riches may be a menace rather than an advantage to the public. The economic effect of the big bonanza in the West indicates the accuracy of this theory. Also it indicates the similarity of the economic forces here to those which helped to destroy Rome. The human forces were equally the same—greed, ambition, selfishness, envy, and a suddenly stimulated desire for luxury in idleness.

Mackay, Fair and Flood had sowed the wind. A harvest of the whirlwind was inevitable. Once started, the development could not be checked, even if its sponsors had desired. And there is no evidence



that they did so desire. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that they acted with savage ruthlessness to continue concentration of wealth and power in their own hands, indifferent to the ruin which such action brought upon the public.

The end may have justified the means. The Mackay fortune especially has served some altruistic purposes and some commercial purposes of benefit to society. The Mackay School of Mines has fitted many men for productive work in the world. The Mackay millions have contributed to the world's system of communication. The Flood and Fair fortunes likewise have assisted in some constructive purposes. Whether the combined benefits to society in the use of these fortunes have offset the ruin worked in their accumulation will be doubted by many. There is no doubt that in the brief years of their accumulation they blighted the country from which they were gained.

As has been stated, in 1875 California led the world in the wide distribution of its wealth. Every one had jobs, constructive energy and a share of prosperity. Then came the big bonanza. Then came the new kings of the Comstock. Then came the forces which destroyed an almost idyllic commonwealth. Unlimited money—easy money—appeared to await any one who would reach out and grasp it. And nearly every one abandoned his normal activities and reached. The fable of the dog and the mirrored bone was re-enacted by thousands of human beings.

First, the bonanza kings increased the Consolidated Virginia monthly dividend from \$324,000 to \$1,-080,000. Hints and rumors that it would soon be doubled and trebled again were circulated. Capital was withdrawn from all the varied industries of the Pacific Coast which up to that time had been in a healthy state of development, and thrown into the Comstock mining stock market. All the mines on the lode acted in sympathy. The valuation of Ophir, adjoining the bonanza, increased to \$31,000,000. Best & Belcher, Mexican, Gould & Curry, Savage, Exchequer, Yellow Jacket, Overman, Bullion, and others reached quotations of from \$3,000,000 to \$20,000,000 each. The total valuation of the Comstock mines rose to \$393,253,440. Speculation and stock transfers were proportionate. Marginal speculation became universal.

The results in San Francisco were more spectacular than in Virginia City. Probably there has never been a period or a place of more extravagant luxury since the days of ancient Rome. The fortunate speculators built magnificent homes. Servants and gardeners were imported from England, chefs from Paris, blooded horses direct from Arabia, rugs from the Orient, objects of art from Italy, furnishings from the world's centers of fine craftsmanship, food and drink from the world's greatest caterers.

In the Nevada and California of 1875, much as in the Rome of the Antonines, according to Gibbon, "the tranquil and prosperous state of the empire was

warmly felt and honestly confessed by the provincials as well as the Romans. They acknowledged that the true principles of social life, laws, agriculture and science, which had first been invented by the wisdom of Athens, were now firmly established by the power of Rome. . . . They celebrated the increasing splendor of the cities, the beautiful face of the country, cultivated and adorned like an immense garden. . . . It was scarcely possible that the eyes of contemporaries should discover in the public felicity the latent causes of decay and corruption."

In the American West, only two years after this felicitous period, as in the divided Roman Empire after Diocletian with "the distractions of empire, the license of the soldiers, the inroads of the barbarians, and the progress of despotism," there was corruption and decay.

As the economic factor of concentration of wealth and the moral factor of profligate luxury brought Rome to ruin, similar powerful economic and moral influences brought the capital of western America to a tragic pass.

San Francisco turned its energies from productive labor to unproductive speculation. The city which had stood foremost in the world in the general distribution of its wealth in 1874 was reduced to desperate poverty in 1877. Even those few business men who were not gambling in mining shares could not obtain money for legitimate business purposes. It was all in the stock-market. Most of the twenty thousand

owners of real estate in San Francisco had mortgaged their property and put the money up on margins in the Comstock. Business came to a standstill.

And in that situation, in January of 1877, the Consolidated Virginia, greatest of the Comstock mines, passed its regular monthly dividend of one million, eighty thousand dollars. The market crashed.

Literally thousands of the residents of San Francisco and other California and Nevada towns who had been substantial, prosperous, progressive, productive citizens were reduced to beggary in the streets. Men who had owned and directed large enterprises, employed scores of wage-earners, maintained luxurious homes, driven fine horses, and built prosperity upon a firm foundation, were to be found begging hand-outs at back doors or lunch counters along with those who had been in their employ. No well-dressed man or woman could venture upon the streets without being importuned by hungry beggars. Countless businesses which had furnished employment were closed. There was no work to be had.

Organized charity, promoted by the San Francisco city government, the churches, and such citizens as had retained their fortunes, could not begin to meet the needs of the derelicts. Twenty thousand persons were fed in a day from charity in a city of hardly more than ten times that number. When the city government offered employment at manual labor in public works promoted for the emergency, thousands applied, eager to wield a shovel at one dollar a day.

The applicants included former executives, professional men and skilled workers of every type.

"In Pauper Alley," wrote Charles Howard Shinn, "one can walk any time in business hours and see creatures that once were millionaires and leading operators. Now they live by free lunches in beer cellars and on stray dimes tossed to them 'for luck.' Women too form a part of the wretched crowd that haunt the end of the alley where it joins its more prosperous neighbor streets, and beg speculators to give them a pointer or to carry a share of stock for them. These are the 'dead mudhens' as the men are the 'dead ducks' of the Comstock share gamblers. Horrible things one sees and hears of here. Old friends you thought were prosperous but had not heard of for years shove themselves out of the huddle and beg for the price of a glass of whisky. There stands a once prosperous printer—in rags. He took flyers on the street too many times. Yonder beggar lost four hundred thousand dollars in a single summer, all good gold. The ghost of many a murdered happiness walks among these half-insane paupers as they chatter like apes of lost fortunes and of the prospects of their favorite stocks. Really it is a frightful thing to walk there and look at the seamy side of the silken garment of fortune."

And most tragic of all was the fact that little or none of the wealth which had made the West a region

of general affluence had been destroyed. On the contrary, the Comstock mines had added some two hundred million dollars in tangible assets to the combined riches of the region in the very years of the demoralization. The big bonanza of the new kings of the Comstock alone produced one hundred and five million dollars in bullion. The trouble was that the wealth which had been distributed among thousands of citizens, in thousands of separately owned pieces of real estate, in hundreds of factories and stores, was now concentrated in the hands of a few men.

It is true that without the medium of the mining stock exchange which allowed thousands of individuals to contribute their financial support, large or small, to the development and prosecution of mining upon the Comstock lode, the lode must have been abandoned long before the opening of the big bonanzas at deeper levels. Without some such method of financing through speculation, no mine that did not pay its expenses from the grass roots downward could ever have been developed. There were no individual fortunes equal to the task of digging through hundreds of feet of borrasca such as was encountered in the Justice, the Bullion and the Overman, each of which assessed its stockholders more than three million dollars, and never paid a dividend. Without speculative possibilities no stockholders would ever have paid such assessments. But though the spirit of speculation did provide for the exploitation of the greatest mines on the continent, the tragedy was none the

less complete for the vast majority of those who figured in it.

Primarily, only through the stock exchange could Flood, Mackay and Fair have financed their original developments and carried them through to the big bonanza. Only men with the ruthless ambition of these three, determined to rule, indifferent to all interests outside their own, possessed of extraordinary ability, combining shrewdness with daring, moved by visions of world power, armored with gold against the groans and denunciation of their victims, could have made the dynasty of the big bonanza kings the power which it had become.

Still, though they had risen to the throne with the sudden development of the big bonanza and the fall of Sharon, they were not without troubles. Sutro was still digging his tunnel with its threat of disastrous competition. Squire P. Dewey, roused to anger by losses which he ascribed to the selfish treachery of Fair, was preparing to take away forty million dollars of their profits and bring down upon them the bitter denunciation of the press and most of the people of the Pacific Coast.

Fair had merely indicated the diplomatic character which made him popular with some classes of the Comstockers and gained him the name of "Slippery Jim" with others, when he referred to the boring activities of "poor old Sutro," and asserted that the tunnel might be a good thing for the lode. Either that or he was promptly overruled by his associates. In







the month that Consolidated Virginia had declared its first dividend, the bonanza firm had joined with the other leading interests on the lode to abrogate all the original contracts with the Sutro Tunnel Company. The Mining Committee's bill for a government loan of two million dollars to the company had just been defeated.

Sutro, however, was not helpless. He had behind him an agreement with the McCalmonts to underwrite eight million dollars' worth of bonds if necessary to complete the tunnel. He hired the best attorneys available and proceeded to fight the suit aimed against his contracts. At the same time he continued to push the tunnel with all the force of skilled workmen, improved machinery, mules and dynamite which he could find room to employ.

The tunnel at last actually seemed in a fair way to completion. But the producing mines pressed their suit. The demurrer filed by Sutro's counsel was overruled. This action was given wide publicity in Nevada and California newspapers, many of which were under the domination of the bonanza kings as they had previously been under the domination of the Bank of California.

Then when the disastrous slump in the price of Comstock shares took place, completing the economic ruin already started by withdrawal of money from legitimate business for stock speculation, the public was furious.

"Manipulated by Flood in the interests of the

bonanza kings," said Squire P. Dewey, Sutro and numerous enemies of the firm.

But the financial papers of New York and London merely carried the news of the cessation of Consolidated Virginia dividends, and the great crash in mining stocks. Sutro saw the danger of losing the support of the McCalmonts, who had not sold the tunnel bonds, but were still supplying money from their private resources. He wrote an appeal to the bankers in which he stated that the machinations of their enemies threatened the tunnel plan at a most critical time, but that if the bank would furnish funds to continue the work for four or five months, a point would be reached where Sutro could raise all the needed funds on the Pacific Coast. If they did not furnish the funds, the millions already invested would almost certainly be lost.

The appeal served its purpose. The bank continued to supply money to meet all bills for some months. The tunnel was opened for more than three of its necessary four miles by the time the scene was set for the dénouement of the melodrama.

## CHAPTER XIX

### "DOWN WITH THE KINGS!"

THE mining stock speculators who constituted a majority of the residents of Virginia City and San Francisco were in a frenzy of despair and bitter hate. The savings and hopes of a lifetime, for most of them, had been destroyed. Those who had not seen their businesses or jobs dwindle away to ashes through the withdrawal of money from normal business for speculation, had lost all or most of their capital in the crash which followed the first failure of the Consolidated Virginia dividend.

Starving men and women, citizens who had been substantial factors in their communities and were now reduced to beggary, looked up in their misery to see Mackay, Flood, Fair, Sharon and Jones riding by behind spirited horses, entertaining in palaces, wining and dining upon the finest delicacies the world could provide. The sight stirred the losers almost to madness. They knew that the money which they had lost had not been destroyed. It had merely been concentrated in the hands of the few who were now flaunting it in the faces of the beggars.

In the two and one-half years of tremendous prosperity just preceding, Mackay, Flood and Fair had

come to be synonymous with the big bonanza in the minds of the public. These were the bonanza kings. These then must be the men whose accumulated wealth must have been taken from the public. Threats against their lives were heard in Virginia City and San Francisco. The public was desperate.

In these circumstances the annual meeting of stockholders of Consolidated Virginia was called in the company's main business offices in San Francisco. The minority stockholders were ready and eager for revolt. All had seen their own holdings crash in value with the failure of the dividend. They blamed the bonanza kings for not advising them of the state of affairs in time to avoid the crash.

A leader of this minority was Squire P. Dewey. He had been a bitter enemy of the bonanza kings, and especially of Fair, since his losses in the market following the Virginia City fire. So he attended this annual meeting prepared to make trouble. For moral and voting support he took with him an English capitalist and former Member of Parliament named James White, who owned two hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock in the Consolidated Virginia.

The meeting opened with conventional routine which could not conceal or restrain the hostility of the minority stockholders. Dewey quickly gained the floor, charged Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien with corruption and fraud in the management of the mine, and demanded that they be replaced by honest men. The meeting was instantly in a turmoil.

But Dewey held the floor and elaborated his charges, supporting them in part with evidence. He asserted that the bonanza kings had operated the mines from the very start of the big bonanza in such manner as to rob the stockholders and bring the entire Pacific Slope to the verge of ruin. Going into detail, he asserted that the Pacific Mill and Mining Company, the bonanza kings' milling monopoly which had succeeded Sharon's Union Mill monopoly, had literally robbed the mine stockholders of sixteen million, seven hundred thousand dollars in bullion. This bullion, he said, had been taken by the bonanza kings who owned the Pacific Mills from the tailings of the mine's ore, the residue left after the first working of the ore from the mine. These tailings, he said, and cited the mill's contracts to prove it, were reserved to the Pacific Mill monopoly, without provision for the mine stockholders. In other words, the bonanza kings worked over the ore, paid themselves high rates for the service, paid themselves and the minority mine stockholders dividends from the bullion, and then worked over the tailings again and put the money amounting to sixteen million, seven hundred thousand dollars in their pockets instead of dividing it among the stockholders with the original dividends.

Not only that, he said, but the mill monopoly further robbed the stockholders of ten per cent. of their ore by arbitrarily receipting for only ninety per cent. of the weight of ore at the shaft, on the absurd theory that there was a ten-per-cent. loss between mine and

mill. This fraud, he estimated, had also run into millions.

Not content with this, Dewey charged, the bonanza firm's milling monopoly was robbing other mines throughout the district by similar practises. In substantiation of that charge he cited the fact that the Ophir, with a production of two million, three hundred and fifty thousand dollars in bullion in the past year, had not declared a dividend because all the profits had been absorbed by the bonanza firm in the form of milling fees and so forth. The Chollar-Potosi, yielding an average of one hundred tons of ore a day for five years, had paid five hundred dollars a day to the mills and not one cent to its stockholders. The Belcher had paid one thousand dollars a day to the mills and nothing to its stockholders. Dewey further emphasized the point that the Consolidated Virginia, largely owned by the bonanza firm, had paid the Pacific Mill company owned by the same men, five million, three hundred and twenty thousand dollars in thirty-two months in addition to the sixteen million, seven hundred thousand dollars which it had handed them in the bullion of its tailings.

Nearing his climax, Dewey then asserted that Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien had prospected the bonanza with diamond drills in advance of actual mining operations, and upon the information as to extent and quality of ore so gained had manipulated stock prices to their own great profit and at the expense of the minority.

Mackay indignantly denied that charge.

Dewey promptly cited official reports of Fair to prove that the diamond drill was used and Mackay was a liar.

Mackay and his associates were growing restive under the bitter attack and damning charges. E. C. Platt, evidently a friend of the bonanza firm, sought to shut off the pestiferous Dewey with a resolution:

"Resolved, That all the matters and things, acts, contracts, transactions and disbursements made and entered into, agreed upon or executed by the Board of Trustees during the last year be, and the same are hereby ratified, approved and confirmed."

That almost started a riot. Half a dozen shareholders were on their feet at once. There were threats of personal violence. But Dewey displayed such calm logic as gave force to all his previous utterances. Such a resolution is entirely unnecessary if the actions of the board have been proper and legal, he said. If the board's actions have been improper, certainly the stockholders do not wish to whitewash them. Platt's resolution was howled down, and the debate proceeded to personalities.

James White, the British capitalist, interposed a remark in general support of Dewey's charges. Mackay flew into a rage, with a revelation of character which he had been at some pains to conceal. He suggested that a suggestion of dishonesty came very



poorly from an Englishman. He (Mackay) was in London at the time of the Flagstaff trouble, and did not believe there was an honest man in London.

Friends, fearful of the effect of such an outburst, made an effort to check Mackay. He subsided with the remark that, "All I wanted was to give them a little hint on their own side."

It all came to little except to put the charges against the bonanza kings definitely on record. Dewey's hope to depose them, of course, was futile. They held the majority of the stock and naturally voted it exclusively in their own interests. But the meeting did serve the purpose of preserving to posterity some evidence and much contemporary opinion to the effect that the bonanza kings were a greedy, ruthless, unscrupulous group, morally beyond the pale, even if legally within it. Also it prepared the way for the subsequent suits for recovery of \$40,-444,068 alleged by minority stockholders to have been wrongfully diverted by the ruling powers.

The press of San Francisco was almost unanimous in its denunciation of the bonanza firm. *The Mail* commented:

"The magnificent Mackay, who is indignant at the public want of appreciation of the disinterested course pursued by his firm in kindly looking after Consolidated Virginia for the trifling remuneration of about ninety cents of every dollar it produces, loftily rebukes Mr. Dewey as a 'stock gambler.'

There is an ice-clad altitudinous height of impudence about this that is not readily grasped by the ordinary mind. The four modern representatives of the original forty of Arabian Nights memory, having fallen upon the wayfarer, divided his shekels, and cast lots for his raiment, reproach him betimes for being out over night. A 'stock gambler' is good."

"The whole history of this bonanza deal," said *The Chronicle*, "is a history of duplicity, fraud and cunning venality without precedent or excuse of any kind. They (the bonanza kings) have won the memorable distinction of having preferred to be millionaires by tricky stock jobbing, when they might have been millionaires by honest mining. So they must expect the natural reward—the hatred and contempt of mankind."

Said *The News Letter*: "This gentleman (White) was treated by the rude-tongued Mackay in a way calculated to disgrace himself, discredit the State, and damage certain mining and banking management."

But though the popular cry was "Down with the kings!" they did not fall. They were still too well buttressed by wealth and political power.

Dewey continued the fight outside the meeting, declaring that Flood, a member of the San Francisco Exchange, had manipulated prices by means of wash sales through his broker. In evidence of the extent

of such sales Dewey cited the broker's retirement with a fortune of half a million dollars, gained from commissions of one-fourth and one-half per cent., indicating sales of vast numbers of shares. The records of the exchange were dug up to prove that in the previous year, 1876, seven hundred and fifty thousand shares of Consolidated Virginia had changed hands on the board, although the entire capital stock was only five hundred and forty thousand shares. Dewey offered these figures as sufficient evidence of the truth of his charges of wash sales for manipulative purposes. Incidentally, he said, the Nevada Bank, controlled by the bonanza firm, had assisted such stock jobbing to the advantage of Flood and his associates by extending or calling loans at critical periods.

Altogether the weight of evidence and opinion indicated quite conclusively that Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien formed no philanthropic organization. It also indicated that the public was in a state of financial hysteria.

Within three months after the first failure of the dividend, Consolidated Virginia and California alone dropped a total of one hundred and forty million dollars. The value of every mine on the Comstock fell in sympathy. Even mines in California which had been producing steadily for a quarter of a century dropped in value.

Banks went to the wall throughout California and Nevada. Businesses of all kinds failed. Within a

few months there were four hundred and fifty forced bankruptcies of major proportions. And this despite the fact that the industrial and agricultural production of California six months earlier had been at the highest point in their history. The cause lay clearly in the mining stock market.

One San Francisco newspaper said: "Then men who have soaked their stock in the maelstrom will agree that over the door of the Bank of Nevada should be written in letters of fire: 'All who enter here leave hope behind!' "

Economists found what comfort they could in the theory that the catastrophe had demonstrated to the world that the bonanza firm virtually owned the Comstock and operated it strictly in their own interests. This knowledge, said the optimists, will work a general good. It will force money out of stocks and into legitimate channels.

As a theory that might have been encouraging, but the sad fact was that nearly all the available money in the West had been concentrated in the hands of the bonanza kings. There was little help for the non-speculating business men who had seen their businesses ruined in the general slump, and who could not come back because of the wide-spread reduction of buying. Their bankrupt owners blamed the bonanza kings. The stock gamblers blamed the bonanza kings. The newspapers blamed the bonanza kings. Feeling ran high. The lives of Mackay, Flood and Fair were in danger.

Dewey extended his attacks with the intimation that the bonanza firm had indirectly bribed Deidesheimer and the Director of the Mint to make their first glowing announcements of the fabulous amount of riches in sight in the big bonanza.

"Recent investigation of the official transactions of Linderman (Director of the Mint) has disclosed the fact that the wife of that gentleman became the owner of a large number of shares at about the time of the 'disinterested' report by her husband," Dewey wrote for publication. "This was the report that captured French capital. Even the officials highest in authority, including the President of the United States (Grant), members of the Cabinet, and heads and subordinates of departments were lured into confidence and became contributors to the exchequer of the bonanza firm."

Even the thick-skinned bonanza kings, armored in gold against attack, could not quietly tolerate and ignore such charges. They inspired a long anonymous attack upon Dewey in the *San Francisco Bulletin*, attempting to show that he had been a bad loser in the bonanza gamble, that he had sought personal information from Fair through which to recoup his losses, and that having failed to get satisfactory information he had threatened Fair and was now venting his spite upon the firm.

Dewey promptly accepted the gage of battle, and

published a categorical reply to the anonymous attack, citing facts and figures to contradict some of the aspersions, and more facts and figures to prove the bonanza kings were greedy, unscrupulous and utterly selfish money grubbers, untrue to their minority stockholders and corrupt to the verge of criminality.

Just how much was fact, how much hearsay, and how much venom in the Dewey pamphlet is difficult to say at this late day. We know, however, that the sympathy of the public was with him. We know also that subsequent developments in the mining stock market and in the mines and mills of the Comstock tended to give weight and verisimilitude to his assertions.

"I at least had sense enough to know that Mr. Flood was a moral pachyderm whose sensibility was not to be stimulated to the point of justice by any ordinary sense of shame or fear of exposure," Dewey wrote. And apparently the best that Fair could reply was that Dewey was a stock gambler. Even that, strictly speaking, was not the truth. Dewey was a man of twenty-five years' residence in California, with a fortune acquired in legitimate business, and a reputation for good citizenship.

In any event, the panic which had been started by the passing of the Consolidated Virginia's dividend in January continued to take its toll of all business and most private fortunes on the Coast through the spring. Dividends were suspended through February, March and April. By that time the market quotations on

Consolidated Virginia were down to bargain prices. It is difficult not to believe that the bonanza firm took advantage of such prices to buy heavily before they resumed dividends in May, with resulting stimulation in stocks.

In the same period production had fallen off greatly in the other mines of the lode. A score of mines were working entirely in *borrasca*, not hoisting a pound of ore. These mines were living on assessments levied upon their stockholders. And the stockholders were very weary of that. Columns upon columns of legal notices filled the newspapers, advertising for sale the stocks of hundreds of persons who had failed to meet their assessments. The Comstock was ripe for another economic revolution. But for the fact that the bonanza kings were still in the strategic position, enjoying the inside information which had made them great, a fourth dynasty might have arisen to power. But no one had sufficient influence to lead a revolution. While minority stockholders watched their holdings sold out and their fortunes destroyed, Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien maintained control and prepared for another coup. Only Adolph Sutro found some comfort in the strained situation.

"I would much rather see mining stocks way down," he wrote to a friend in San Francisco, early in the collapse of 1877. "I have little doubt that such will be the case during the next year or two.

The state of affairs which must follow would be greatly in our favor, for while stocks are down and assessments being paid, people will look to every possible advantage which can be secured, while on the other hand while stocks are up and large dividends being paid, the savings which could be secured by proper working of the mines are entirely overlooked."

The bore was advancing steadily toward the lode, through physical difficulties of heat, foul air, hard rock and swelling seams of clay such as man has seldom overcome. And Sutro was right in the contention that the unprofitable period which the lode had reached was inspiring a demand for the more economical mining conditions which a completed tunnel would produce.

The bonanza kings felt the force of this popular demand, and writhed under the hatred in which they were held by the losers on the lode and in business. When facts could not be cited against them, gossip was circulated freely. One such story revealed in contemporary records may be cited as typical:

"It seems that when Mackay returned from Europe the last time, he ascertained by looking over his accounts that Fair had him \$100,000 worse off than nothing. He wrote a blank check for \$100,000 and calling Fair into the room simply said, 'God damn you; sign that or I'll kill you.' Fair signed. How is that for a story? There are some who believe it."



Sutro himself wrote to his bankers in London:

"Mr. James Fair, one of the bonanza firm, has made his appearance in Washington—a most suspicious circumstance, though he may have come on business other than what concerns us. This brings the entire council of conspirators representing the three largest interests on the Comstock lode here together in Washington; Mr. Sharon representing one, Mr. Jones another, and Mr. Fair the third and most important. Great jealousy exists between these parties and I think they would be afraid to move for fear that either one of them might make a secret combination with us for the purpose of defeating the others."

So the first months of the slump in the big bonanza drifted along. Both the persistent energy of Adolph Sutro and the forces set in motion by Squire P. Dewey annoyed the bonanza kings. The suits promoted by Dewey finally were filed in the name of one John H. Burke, demanding forty million dollars of the bonanza firm's allegedly ill-got gains for the minority stockholders. The minority had organized to finance and press the suits. Another committee of small stockholders was urging completion and use of the tunnel to reduce mining costs, and save their depreciated stocks from complete ruin.

A report gained circulation and credence to the effect that Mackay wished to compromise with the tunnel company, assist that work to completion,

drain and ventilate the mines, prove up the ore bodies at the lowest levels and resume production throughout the lode. The same report added that Flood was weakening under the denunciation heaped upon him by the press of San Francisco since the suspension of dividends.

Early in the summer, however, Consolidated Virginia resumed dividends and business generally improved. Just as Sutro had explained, when the mines were paying, interest in more economical mining and milling methods decreased. The hoped-for compromise was forgotten. For the moment they did not appear to need the tunnel.

Then Robert McCalmont, head of the banking house which had been financing the tunnel for years in face of all opposition and disappointment, was stricken with paralysis. Other members of the firm refused to advance more money. Sutro, with his tunnel nearly four miles long, within one thousand feet of the point at which it was to intercept the lode and start collecting royalties, faced collapse of his dream, his work, and the hope of fortune and power which had stimulated him for all the years since he had come to the Comstock in 1860.

Desperately he set out to raise funds elsewhere. But the bonanza firm with its Nevada Bank directly or indirectly exercised a powerful influence over most of the money in the West. What it did not control or influence, the Bank of California, again prosperous since its reorganization by Sharon, did. And both

were enemies of Sutro. They blocked his every move to obtain funds through ordinary commercial channels. Private fortunes alone offered any field for his cultivation. He proceeded to cultivate. Just as he had done ten years earlier, he peddled stock in his tunnel personally wherever he could find a buyer. But the stock buyers of the West had been badly burned. They shunned the fire. It was a soul-killing job. Still Sutro managed to bring in some money to continue operations.

In the spring of 1878, the bonanza firm, working in the nineteen-hundred-foot levels of the Consolidated Virginia and the California, began to realize that the remaining ore was limited. A second suspension of dividends appeared to the experienced miners' eyes of Mackay and Fair to be inevitable. However, they did not let the public in on the probability.

On the contrary, Mackay made a public announcement that there was twenty million dollars' worth of ore in sight. In so doing, doubtless, he expected to stimulate the market sufficiently so that the bonanza firm could unload some of its stock at a good figure. The public, however, remembered that Deidesheimer once had reported one billion, five hundred million dollars' worth of ore in sight when the big bonanza first was opened, and that only one hundred million dollars had been taken out. Stock-buyers were not quite so gullible as they had been. Many of those who might have been gullible were broke. The

twenty-million-dollar ore report failed to boost prices greatly.

So, when in May and June of 1878 the Consolidated cut dividends in half, prices slumped again. The bonanza firm was still holding control. It would be poor business, entirely out of keeping with their reputation for shrewd stock jobbing, to sell at the low figures. They must keep up the price as well as possible while they unloaded.

They did not admit that the bonanza was nearing exhaustion. The reduction of dividends was explained as due to the bad physical condition of the mine which increased mining costs greatly. Economy and eventual profits made it advisable to shut off production entirely for two of three months while extensive repairs in timbering and machinery were effected.

The explanation was not very generally believed. Stock prices continued to slump from the position regained after the resumption of dividends in the previous year. And while the bonanza kings sweated with the problem of stimulating a profitable market on which to unload their depreciated holdings, the tunnel builders sweated in their final desperate effort to reach the lode in readiness for royalties which they expected with the resumption of ore production.

The thrill of vast and easy wealth which had kept the Comstock in a fever of excitement for four years had ended. Still the extraordinary confidence of its great men in unlimited bonanzas at greater depth

helped to maintain a semblance of the old activity and enthusiasm in the community. The investors, speculators and mines which were in borrasca were strengthened by memories of the history of the lode.

They recalled that its eighteen years of life had been marked repeatedly by just such periods of depression as that which now gripped the district. The initial years of fabulous fortunes wrung from the upper levels of the Ophir and near-by mines had been followed by years of trial during which only the Bank of California's money and monopoly under Sharon's powerful hand had kept the shafts sinking and the town alive. The comparatively small production of those lean years was similar to the rate of production now. But that depression had been followed by the Crown Point bonanza which gave new life and prosperity to the district. That in turn had been followed by the Consolidated Virginia bonanza, and the California bonanza, which had brought wealth, fame and activity unbelievable to the Comstock.

The "true fissure" nature of the lode, indicating to geologists and mining experts a formation containing recurring bonanzas to unlimited depths, was widely accepted. They had been in borrasca before. They would be in bonanza again. The old adage of the Mexican silver mines—"as many days as you spend in borrasca, that many shall you spend in bonanza"—was recalled to hearten them. Some mines had delved and dug for eighteen weary years, supported almost entirely by assessments on their stockholders, without

ever paying a dividend. They might continue to operate on that basis. Others had rich reserves in their treasuries. They also could go on. The miners and mill-workers cared little where their wages came from, so long as they came regularly.

The thrill of quick fortunes was gone for the moment, but it would return again, Virginia City believed. In the meantime there was another thrill to hold the interest of the district—the more sporting thrill of the continued race between the Sutro tunnel and the mines, each seeking to be first at the point where the tunnel would intercept the lode.

Thus came the last melodramatic climax in the story of the Comstock.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE LAST GREAT BATTLE

WHEN the Consolidated Virginia reduced its regular monthly dividend of one million, eighty thousand dollars to half that amount, in May of 1878, the Sutro tunnel was still six hundred and forty feet from the lode. The McCalmonts' financing of the work had just been stopped by Robert McCalmont's acute illness. Adolph Sutro was raising funds by valiant effort to continue his progress through stubborn rock, foul air, steaming floods and bulging walls two thousand feet below the level of Virginia City.

The California mine, owned equally with the Consolidated Virginia by the bonanza kings, declared its regular monthly dividend of one million, eighty thousand dollars. So far as Sutro and the great majority of persons interested in the Comstock knew, there were still many millions' worth of ore waiting to pay the tunnel company two dollars a ton royalty as soon as the tunnel connection was made. The tunnel drove onward hopefully.

Those mines which were still working in ore were now close to the two-thousand-foot level. Recently they had struck new floods of poisonous hot water which destroyed the efficiency of the miners, bur-

dened the machinery far beyond its strength, and otherwise added to their costs of mining and exploration in search of new ore bodies. In these circumstances the Savage, Hale & Norcross, Crown Point, Belcher and several other leading companies dissolved their combination against the tunnel company, abandoned their suits, and announced their intention of abiding by the original contracts, signed twelve years before.

Most of the mines, it appeared, had little to lose and much to gain through the completion of the tunnel and their adherence to the terms stipulated for its use. As long as they took out no ore they would have to pay nothing for the invaluable service of draining and ventilating their workings. If they hoisted ore they could afford to pay. It was the argument Sutro had used for years. And at this late date it was accepted by nearly all the companies which were not producing.

The big bonanza mines still opposed the plan. Although the Consolidated Virginia had reduced its dividend it was still taking out tons of ore, and the California was producing richly. If they came into line on the tunnel project they would have to pay Sutro a great deal of money, and were likely to lose the milling monopoly which Dewey had proved was netting them millions.

In these circumstances the tunnel pressed onward at the rate of ten feet a day. Early in July the sweating miners at the heading of the tunnel felt the jar of



blasts of the miners in the depths of the Savage shaft, a few yards away. A few days later the directors of the Consolidated Virginia passed even the reduced dividend.

The next day, July 8, 1878, Adolph Sutro, stripped to the waist in the stifling heat, like the drillers and muckers around him, fired the blast which broke the tunnel heading through into the Savage shaft.

The cheer of the workmen in the tunnel almost equaled in volume the roar of the blast. Promptly it was echoed by a cheer from the workers in the Savage. And instantly the cheers were smothered by the rush of dust, smoke and foul air which roared from the tunnel through the drifts of the Savage, through connecting corridors to other mines, and up the shafts to the surface at Virginia City. Workers in the mines were almost suffocated for a time. Workers in the tunnel were almost swept from their feet by the force of the sudden draft, clearing the tunnel of gas and fumes which had been accumulating for years. But miners and tunnel workers alike grinned at the momentary inconvenience while they shook hands, slapped backs, and roared with excitement over the accomplishment. The working miners of the district had long been partisans of the tunnel project. A great many of them held stock in it. Laboring in the super-heated fetid air of the deeper workings, they had looked forward eagerly to the day when the tunnel would circulate cool fresh air to make their toil more endurable. At the moment of connection

between the tunnel and the Savage drift, the only emotions apparent were of excitement and good-will.

Still the tunnel company had its powerful enemies on the Comstock. The local newspapers, definitely under the thumb of the bonanza kings, as they had earlier been under the thumb of the Bank of California, belittled the accomplishment with the briefest of announcements that the tunnel connection had been made. A correspondent of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote a slightly more colorful report, incidentally revealing the tension which still existed.

"The town of Sutro was aglow with enthusiasm last night," said *The Chronicle*, "on account of the connection with the Savage. Salutes were fired, Sutro made a speech, and wine, beer and whisky were free to all.

"Mr. Sutro and a party of ladies and gentlemen informed Mr. Gillette, superintendent of the Savage mine, by telegraph, that they would start from the mouth of the Sutro tunnel to go up the Savage shaft to Virginia City at 4 P. M., this day. Mr. Gillette telegraphed that he would ask permission from the San Francisco office. When the party reached the Savage drift they were informed that permission would not be granted, and it leaked out that General Thomas H. Williams, president of the Savage Mining Company, no doubt acting under instructions from the bonanza firm, refused the passage of Mr. Sutro and his party. Mr. Sutro thereupon concluded to

manage to get up the shaft in spite of the refusal, and succeeded in reaching the surface at Virginia City.

"At a banquet which succeeded at that place the health of the Miners' Union was drunk, and three groans were given the directors of the Savage mine."

The following day *The Chronicle* printed a statement that the miner who had permitted Sutro and his party to pass up the Savage shaft was promptly discharged at the order of Williams. "There is a good deal of feeling among the miners at this narrow-minded action."

It was evident that the race between tunnel and mines, which had been looked upon popularly as a thrilling sporting event, was a deadly serious matter to the principals, and that any victory must be forced, not conceded.

On the same day that the connection was made, the directors of the California mine reduced their monthly dividend from one million, eighty thousand dollars to five hundred forty thousand dollars, just as their associated Consolidated Virginia had done two months earlier. So close was the race between the tunnel company and the big bonanza.

And now, with the twenty-thousand-foot tunnel actually communicating with one shaft sunk two thousand feet through the lode from the slope of Mount Davidson, the lines were drawn for the final battle.

Certain opponents of the tunnel company had

threatened to use the bore, if completed, to drain the flooded mines without agreeing to pay the royalties specified. Sutro had no such idea.

He prepared to check such invasion of his property by the simple expedient of closing a water-tight bulkhead with a movable gate near the heading of the tunnel. This would check arbitrary drainage from the mines and force the steaming water back into the drifts and shafts from whence it came. The goodwill which had marked the meeting of miners and tunnel builders on the day of the connection vanished with the prospects of a fight.

While the miners were threatening, the tunnel workers were putting the finishing touches on the bulkhead. Then the miners invaded the tunnel, armed with picks, shovels and revolvers. The tunnel workers produced similar arms. Deputy sheriffs appeared upon the scene and dragged the embattled laborers to the surface. An injunction was sought to prevent the use of the bulkhead. Again the workers clashed.

But now, for the first time in his twelve years of warfare with the recurring monopolies on the Comstock, Adolph Sutro had the upper hand. Although the bonanza mines still refused to make a working agreement with the tunnel company, Sutro could sit back for a moment and wait for the heat, steam and water to bring his enemies to terms.

He did not have long to wait. Almost in the first moment of relaxation there came word that the Julia

mine, an independent in no way connected with the bonanza firm, had struck a reservoir which had flooded all the lower workings. Promptly on the heels of the report came the officers of the mine.

Would Mr. Sutro enter into a contract with the Julia for drainage and ventilation upon a royalty basis similar to the early and repudiated contracts?

Mr. Sutro would—upon his own terms. The contract which was quickly signed provided for a payment of one hundred thousand dollars toward the cost of constructing the tunnel onward to the Julia shaft, together with renewal of the original royalty agreement. Drainage could not begin until the fourteen-hundred-foot extension had been completed.

The dyke was breaking. The boy had pulled his finger from the leaking hole. The Combination mine struck a reservoir, and the mine quickly flooded beyond the capacity of its pumps. Its officials came to Sutro. No extension was necessary to drain this mine.

Would Mr. Sutro agree to drainage at once on condition of renewal of the royalty agreements?

Mr. Sutro would not. All the companies on the lode must come into a new agreement. To drain one mine would drain a dozen, as many of their workings were connected. Besides, a covered drain must be constructed in the tunnel to prevent the poisonous fumes of the steaming water from asphyxiating men and mules. If all the mines on the lode would agree to pay a monthly sum equal to two per cent. on the

capital investment in the tunnel, and would agree to the royalty, he would proceed to drain the lode, using half the monthly income to build the necessary covered drain and extend the tunnel to all mines. The officers of the Combination mine trudged back to their directors and reported. The directors refused to agree.

Then the Belcher mine found itself unable to compete with the rising floods in its depths. Its directors called upon Sutro. He stated his terms. They could accept or drown. They retired without a decision.

Virginia City and Gold Hill were on edge with excitement. Here was a contest much more exciting than the battle between the bull and the bear which had filled Piper's Opera House with a crowd of wagering miners. The main purse in that battle had been five hundred dollars offered by the owner of the bear against ten head of cattle put up by the owner of the bull. But here was a purse of probable millions. Word of the impasse reached San Francisco, clamoring for resumption of production on the Comstock since the failure of bonanza dividends.

"If he (Sutro) says a thing shall be done; it is done," commented *The Alta California*. "If he says water shall not go through the tunnel until all the companies sign the contract; that water will not travel to the Carson river through the town of Sutro."

And the newspaper was right. The Hale & Nor-

cross pump broke repeatedly under the strain of lifting water two thousand feet. Its superintendent turned the steaming flood into the tunnel. Sutro promptly closed his bulkhead. The flood backed up into the mine.

Then the California mine, which had cut its dividend in half on the day when the tunnel connected with the Savage shaft, passed the reduced dividend. The big bonanza was at an end. The days of glory on the Comstock were over. Yet few men recognized the fact. The public was calling for more production and more dividends. If they could be obtained by operating through the Sutro tunnel, by all means make the necessary agreements to do so. Pressure upon the various directorates became enormous.

Stocks which had been crashing and rising to crash again ever since the first suspension of Consolidated Virginia dividends in the first four months of the preceding year, crashed once more. Scarcely a mine of the thirty then working on the lode was producing enough ore to pay the wages of its laborers. In this situation the Sutro tunnel became the chief hope of the Comstock.

Again the columns of *The Enterprise* were filled with legal advertisements of stocks offered for sale to cover unpaid assessments. Still many of the directors and superintendents of the various companies were as certain as ever that new bonanzas awaited exploration of the lode at greater depths. The chief difficulty

was that of obtaining funds to prosecute this exploration and deeper mining work. The Pacific Coast investors had been generally frightened out of the mining gamble, or so completely stripped of money that they could not meet the demand. In such circumstances any method of cheaper operation was appealing.

One by one the various boards of directors sent their representatives to Sutro with offers to capitulate. Even the bonanza kings, still in control of the Consolidated Virginia and California, joined the procession. A compromise was reached which included but one insignificant concession from Sutro. He agreed to reduce his two-dollar royalty to half that amount on any ore assaying less than forty dollars a ton. But against that concession he forced the mines to advance, without interest, seventy dollars for each foot of the lateral branches of the tunnel to be extended into the various workings.

Sutro's triumph was complete. For the moment he was in fact king of the Comstock, the head of the fourth dynasty to rule that kingdom of wealth and power. The annual *Pacific Coast Mining Review*, published at the moment of the man's triumph and the Comstock's collapse, summed up the victory:

"No other man probably on all the earth's surface could have perfected that scheme and brought it to successful issue in the face of such difficulties as Adolph Sutro has encountered for over fourteen years.



History will remember Sutro for centuries to come, not only as the projector of the greatest mining enterprise on the American continent, but as a man who, in carrying out his mighty task, met with obstructions of all kinds and conditions that would have appalled many as stout hearts as his, perhaps at the very outset. There is something majestic in the way Sutro overrode all obstacles. . . . No other man than Sutro could have done all this—no other would have dared attempt it.”

It was in fact a brilliant achievement. And Sutro took his profit, sold the bulk of his own stock in the company when the tunnel stock was virtually the only security in the district commanding a market, and resigned his kingship within two years of his ascendancy.

The first kings, Comstock and Old Virginia, had sold out for a song, and abdicated. The second king, Sharon, had ruled with an iron hand for ten years, and had been deposed by a combination of fate and even shrewder men. His title had been seized by Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien, who had been preparing for years to become “the bonanza kings.” This third dynasty in turn had been deposed from the ruins of their kingdom by Sutro, favored for the moment by fate, after fourteen years of buffeting.

Comstock's brief rule had been the rule of an ignorant bully, placed by chance in a position to exercise such talents when the pioneers around him were

equally ignorant, and less assertive. Sharon's rule had been that of a shrewd and ruthless organizer and monopolist. The rule of the "bonanza kings" had been that of intelligent miners and shrewd financiers, merciless alike in their stripping of the natural wealth of the lode and in their stripping of too-credulous stockholders. Sutro's rule was that of power attained through the circumstance that his long constructive labor had been completed at the psychological moment when the failing mines were forced by economic pressure to turn to his tunnel as the only practical method of exploring unproductive depths.

The abdicating Henry Thomas Paige Comstock, having done nothing but give his name to the district and help to attract the first constructive capital, departed in poverty. The deposed Sharon, having developed the mines, the railroad, the mills and other improvements under a dictatorship which should make Mussolini blush with failure, had reaped a personal fortune of fifteen million dollars and a place in the United States Senate. The "bonanza kings" had accumulated fortunes aggregating probably two hundred million dollars. They might well have sneered at the looted kingdom left to the new potentate. Whether they were deposed or abdicated makes little difference. They alone were to go down in popular history as "the bonanza kings." The latest monarch, Adolph Sutro, ruled a crumbling kingdom briefly, resigned his scepter to the directors of his company and went his way with a million or two.

But one brief flash of the old color and enthusiasm, one recurrence of the old holiday spirit which had always appeared in the Comstock at the slightest excuse, marked this period. It was inspired by the visit of General Grant, Mrs. Grant, and their son, Ulysses S. Grant, Jr. The fame of the Comstock had been thoroughly impressed upon the nation and upon Grant himself as President. He wanted to see the source of the hundreds of millions in bullion which had gone far toward maintaining the value of the American dollar in the reconstruction days following the Civil War.

Virginia City was eager to play the host to a national figure so celebrated. For days it forgot its troubles in the task of preparation. Flags and bunting waved throughout the town as if a dull day had never been known.

The former President and party, escorted by the Governor of Nevada and staff, arrived at the Gold Hill station in the palace car "California," and were greeted by fifteen hundred school-children and almost every adult citizen of Virginia and Gold Hill. A carriage with six horses took the distinguished guests through the triumphal arches and gay hangings of C Street to a state dinner and reception at which the former President was made an honorary member of the Society of Pacific Pioneers. Virginia City was still doing its best.

On the following day, according to the account in *The Daily Alta California*:



*Courtesy California State Library.*

VISITING THE COMSTOCK MINES, OCTOBER 29, 1879.

*Left to right: U. S. Grant, Jr., Mrs. Grant, General U. S. Grant, Mrs. James G. Fair. Kneeling: Guide.*



"An early morning start took the party through the city in a four-in-hand turnout, by way of Silver City and Dayton to the town of Sutro where they were welcomed by the ringing of bells and discharge of dynamite bombs. Mrs. Adolph Sutro received the party at the old Sutro mansion. Breakfast at the Sutro home was an elaborate affair. While assembling on the porch of the mansion, preparatory to starting for the mines, much merriment was occasioned at the General's appearance in the costume of the miner.

"The party was placed aboard mine cars and amidst the cheers of assembled crowds disappeared in the darkness of the tunnel. A thirty-five-minute trip underground preceded their leaving the cars, and walking, the better to examine the underground workings of the mine and witness the execution of the powerful drilling appliances required in driving a work of this character. The covered boxes which convey the steaming water from the Comstock mines were also an object of considerable interest.

"The trip continued south where the party were hoisted to the surface at Virginia City. Shortly after noon General Grant visited the Union and North Consolidated Virginia shafts and inspected the massive machinery in company with Messrs. Mackay and Fair.

"The party left that night for Reno and points east."

There have been no kings of the Comstock since

that day. The ancient seat of monarchs has been unworthy of such a title for fifty years. The kingdom became a republic. The republic disintegrated.

But so great a glory could not fade in a day or in a year. Throughout the half-century which has followed the end of the big bonanza, men have continued to labor in the mines. For half a century the Sutro tunnel has been in operation. Occasionally small bodies of ore, as rich as in the days of glory, have been uncovered, mined and milled. The Comstock has had its ups and downs in this half-century as it had in the preceding two decades. But the "ups" have never been so high, nor the "downs" so low in contrast.

The general trend has been downward until the once great Virginia City itself is literally falling into the labyrinth of abandoned shafts, drifts, tunnels, winzes, stopes and crosscuts which make up more than two hundred miles of underground diggings. In the fifty years which have passed since the exhaustion of the big bonanza, many added millions of dollars' worth of bullion have been taken from the labyrinth. But nearly always the silver with its sprinkling of gold has been uncovered and removed at a cost greater than its worth.

From time to time rumors have spread among mining men that a new bonanza has been discovered. Only a few years ago one such rumor brought to the district several million dollars in outside money for the construction of new mills and the improvement of

old mining facilities to take a new and greater fortune from the depths. But when the writer visited the scene huge trucks and trailers, which must have startled the ghosts of the great men and little men buried in the crumbling cemetery beyond the city, were hauling away this machinery from the last of the great mills, dismantled and fallen into ruin.

Still some heirs to that enthusiasm, if not heirs to the wealth which inspired it, labor in the depths. One, James Leonard, now the great man of a ruined kingdom of wealth and power, virtually controls what is left of the Comstock. The water company, the Sutro tunnel, and some of the mines where a few men still search for new bonanzas are under his rule. And proving himself the proper heir to the kingdom, if not to its scattered riches, Leonard asserts optimistically that the potential resources of the Comstock have scarcely been scratched.

Leonard scorns the fact that the famous Ophir mine, first and one of the greatest of the Comstock treasure-houses, once quoted in the mining stock market at one thousand and four hundred dollars a share is now listed at one cent, without sales, and that others have fallen similarly low. He looks forward with certainty to a day when the Comstock will be greater than ever. In that he is typical of the men who made the Comstock great, and who were made great through it.

Let us hope that he is right. Such a town as Virginia City in the days of the big bonanza offers a thrill



to the pride of Americans. Its accomplishments were greater than its wickedness. It should stand in memory close beside the great vanished herds of buffalo, the trains of covered wagons, the settlements of sod houses, which marked the development of our great prairies. The latter can never return. But if the hope and courage and tenacious energy which made Virginia City a monument in the history of American mining are justified for their heirs, something inspiring might still arise from its ruins.

It is doubtful. The glory of Virginia City now rests in its memories, and probably must remain there. Only the vast wealth which it produced, and the quality of the men concerned, carry on. This wealth and those men must give it a permanent place in the history of the United States.

Their heirs are scattered to the world, but their influence has continued through the years. When the big bonanza was exhausted, when the stocks which had soared to a valuation of half a billion dollars began their downward march to a valuation of one-thousandth part of that sum, the leaders in the rise and fall were still active men. How they continued to use their energies, strengthened by years of fierce struggle, and how they used the fortunes gained from that struggle, are an important sequel to the story of the big bonanza.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PATHS OF GLORY

THE glory of the Comstock could not fade so quickly as the bonanzas faded. Although the mines which had produced its fame were exhausted, both the fame and the fortunes upon which it had been built were very much alive. The men whom the mines had made great were still upon the paths of glory.

Of the bonanza kings, perhaps Mackay was the most interesting in activities subsequent to the collapse of the bonanza, as he was the youngest and richest of the group. Early in the activities of the firm Mackay had purchased the interest of a fifth member named Walker, and had carried this extra fraction with consequent added profit through all the subsequent prosperity of the group.

Mackay was a man of energy and ambition equal to his vast wealth. He was not one who could sit back quietly in futile effort to spend his income. Also he had a charming and socially ambitious wife. San Francisco did not appeal to their ambitions, and Mrs. Mackay maintained an elaborate salon in Paris, and was prominent also in the wealthiest circles of New York and London.

The Irish clerk who had become a day laborer in

the mines, a superintendent, a bonanza king, and a banker was now a figure in American finance. But he was still a man of short temper when crossed, and in the course of some business deal quarreled bitterly with Jay Gould, who had organized the Western Union telegraph system. Mackay was not a man to be content with the calling of hard names. He loved a fight, and the difference with Gould offered opportunity for one.

Looking about for an associate to assist him in a proper chastening of Jay Gould, Mackay hit upon James Gordon Bennett, publisher of *The New York Herald*. *The Herald* had handled Gould without gloves in connection with the Erie Railroad scandals, the Gould-Fisk conspiracy to corner the gold market which resulted in the national financial panic known as "Black Friday," and in other unscrupulous Gould activities. Bennett himself was a wealthy and an arrogant man, with the powerful weapon of *The Herald* in his hands. An alliance with the Mackay wealth and energy against Gould and the Western Union was attractive. It was made.

Thus the Mackay fortune gained from the big bonanza entered national and international affairs in a form of activity still being carried on by the son, Clarence H. Mackay. John W. Mackay and James Gordon Bennett organized the Commercial Cable Company and the Postal Telegraph Company to fight Jay Gould and the Western Union.

After overcoming various great obstacles in the

political graft of the time, Mackay and Bennett succeeded in laying two cables across the Atlantic. With the cables operating, they promptly started a rate war with the Western Union. It was a long and expensive campaign which undoubtedly cost Mackay a vast fortune before it finally was won. In the meantime, however, his fame and popularity had grown alike in America and Europe.

So it came about that he met Georges Boulanger, "the man on horseback," and then the popular military idol of Paris. As minister of war in the French Cabinet, Boulanger was the chief promoter of a policy of revenge which was to take the form of a war of punishment of Prussia for its recent victory over France. Boulanger was a trained soldier of long and honorable experience, and full appreciation of the necessity of adequate provision for his contemplated war. He had already improved the French army with the adoption of repeating rifles for the infantry and the development of high explosives for the artillery. But he believed with Napoleon that an army travels on its stomach. He must make provision on a national scale for his commissary department.

In this situation John Mackay, the bonanza millions, and the well-known Mackay willingness for fight, frolic or speculation on a vast scale, appeared to Boulanger to be sent by Heaven. Boulanger broached the subject cautiously. He would lead France against Prussia while John Mackay provided the breadstuffs to feed the army.

The idea appealed. Mackay returned from Paris to San Francisco and induced his bonanza partner, James C. Flood, to join in the speculation. The result was the first attempt in history to effect a world corner in wheat. Buying operations were intrusted to William Dresbach, a commission merchant with a connection in Liverpool. Arrangements were made for George L. Brander, manager of the Nevada Bank, to honor Dresbach's checks, while Mackay and Flood remained in the background.

All the spot wheat available was purchased, and contracts were made for futures. Prices began to mount until grain commission men began to suspect a pool. As Dresbach's checks were all upon the Nevada Bank, which was known to be controlled by Flood and Mackay, the dealers finally sent a committee to see Mr. Flood and obtain assurance that some one of more substantial reputation and resources than Dresbach was behind the deal. Flood was loath to commit himself, but realized that he must say something.

"You are accepting Mr. Dresbach's contracts?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the committee's spokesman.

"Well, you may go on taking Mr. Dresbach's contracts," said Flood.

"Do you mean that, Mr. Flood?" said the chairman.

"Yes, sir; I do," said Flood.

That was satisfactory to the commission men.

Flood, Mackay and the Nevada Bank, they thought, had enough money to finance any business in the world. If Flood said to accept a contract, Flood would see to it that the contract was kept.

But there came a day when Dresbach refused to take delivery, and made assignment. Mackay and Flood put in all the ready cash they had or could raise to meet the bank's obligations. The very floors of the vault were scraped. Word was circulated that the Nevada Bank for some time had been buying telegraphic exchange on London and paying for it with sixty-day bills, and meeting these bills by drawing others. Then the other San Francisco banks refused to buy the Nevada Bank's bills. Next New York refused to take them. The corner collapsed and Dresbach failed.

Boulanger's bubble had collapsed in a ministerial crisis in France. Mackay hastened back to San Francisco and joined with Flood in an outburst of indignation against Brander. He had been a trusted employee, they said, and had taken advantage of Mackay's absence in Europe and Flood's illness at home in Menlo Park to lend vast sums to Dresbach, a common speculator, with enormous losses to them and to the bank.

"The dishonesty of a man he had trusted broke Flood's heart," according to the account of the incident recorded by the historian Rockwell D. Hunt.

"It is said that he (Brander) received one hundred thousand dollars cash for acting as scapegoat," ac-

cording to another account, by the historian Zoeth Eldredge.

The fact remains that neither Brander nor Dressbach was ever prosecuted for fraud by Mackay, Flood or the Nevada Bank, although the deal nearly wrecked that institution, and left Mackay and Flood with a loss estimated at sixteen million dollars. James G. Fair came to the rescue of the institution and of his former friends and partners with a cash loan of one million dollars which kept the bank's doors open until I. W. Hellman of Los Angeles took it over, placed the stock among his friends, raised new capital and restored the concern to prosperity.

It was the final dramatic public appearance of the bonanza kings in person. O'Brien's death had occurred in 1878 in his home at San Rafael. Flood went abroad shortly after the failure of the wheat corner, to ease his broken heart at the perfidy of an employee, according to his admirers. There he died, in Heidelberg, Germany, in 1888. Chief memorial to his name to-day perhaps is the Flood Building, in San Francisco, built by his heirs. The family has not made itself as famous as the fortune.

John Mackay's heart apparently was less sensitive. He survived the failure of the wheat corner to build himself a business monument which still survives in the cable and telegraph companies controlled by his son, Clarence H. Mackay. An even greater monument is the Mackay School of Mines, appropriately endowed with money taken from Nevada's greatest

mine, and now teaching the advanced science of mining engineering at Reno, Nevada.

John Mackay himself was the last of the bonanza kings to follow the path of glory to its universal conclusion. He died in London in 1902. His widow, and daughter, the Princess Colonna, returned with the body from England. It was entombed, with a simple private ceremony, in a mausoleum which he had erected shortly before.

Clarence H. Mackay, the son who still carries on the Mackay name and fame, was chief heir. Secondary were the widow who had won an enviable place in the social life of Paris, London and New York, and the daughter whose charm had been among the first to ally a great American fortune with a noble old-world title.

But the wheat pit, the almost complete collapse of the Comstock mines, the troubles of the Nevada bank, the long battle with Jay Gould and similar activities had made heavy inroads in the big bonanza fortune, once estimated at one hundred million dollars. In 1903, the year after the death of the greatest of the bonanza kings, the personal property was appraised at \$2,501,726, invested largely in the stock of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, the Commercial Cable Company, and the Commercial Union Telegraph Company.

But the name, fame and fortune were not to pass so swiftly. Witness the thousands of columns of newspaper space throughout America and Europe on



January 5, 1926, devoted to chronicling the fact that on the preceding day Ellin H. Mackay and Irving Berlin had been married by a deputy city clerk in the New York Municipal Building. The news dispatch added that John William Mackay, grandfather of the bride, arrived at the Battery from Dublin in 1840, and that Moses Baline, father of the bridegroom, came from Russia through that same turnstile in 1892.

Newspaper readers throughout the world were entertained by the Associated Press reports of the apparently bitter reaction of the distinguished son of an Irish immigrant to the marriage of his daughter with the jazz-famous son of a Russian immigrant.

It was not the first association of Irish and Jew in the Mackay history. Moses Mock, shrewd, humorous, efficient operator of an independent ferry line in San Francisco Bay smiled tolerantly at the teapot tempest stirred by the Berlin-Mackay wedding and was moved to reminiscence.

"It's amusing," said Moses Mock. "If it hadn't been for a Jewess, probably there wouldn't have been any Clarence Hungerford Mackay. My mother kept a boarding-house in Virginia City. I was born there. I lived there as a kid." He paused and grinned. "Lots of important people lived there as kids. There was Dr. Albert Michelson for instance, who showed Einstein the way.

"Well, I dope it out this way. If my mother hadn't kept that boarding-house, Louise Hungerford

Bryant wouldn't have boarded with her. Neither would John Mackay. But she did, and they did. Otherwise probably they never would have met. My mother introduced them, and promoted the match. Louise was a poor widow, sewing for a living, and not always making it. My mother carried her when she needed it, and John Mackay married her. Later we had the best of evidence that Louise appreciated it. When my father was burned to death and the boarding-house destroyed, Louise Mackay sent a check for five thousand dollars to my mother. It was a life-saver. We don't forget."

The bonanza fortunes are far-flung. Even many of the newspapers which carried the Berlin-Mackay story to a jazz-loving, gossip-loving world sprang indirectly from the Comstock. The fortune which helped to found the Hearst journals had its start in the great lode. *The New York Herald-Tribune* is still associated in some minds with the late great Darius Ogden Mills who accumulated millions as a director of the great Union Mill and Mining Company monopoly organized by William Sharon. Almost daily in the news comes some name or incident recalling the Comstock to the discerning eye and accurate memory. Quite recently the visiting King and Queen of Siam were guests at Ophir Hall of the D. O. Mills estate. "Ophir!" It was a name to conjure with on the Comstock, the first and one of the greatest of the mines, and Mills proved himself an efficient conjuror.

Others carried on as adequately with the fortunes and energy developed in those thrilling days.

James G. Fair was no longer known as "Slippery Jim." With the first profits of the big bonanza above what was actually needed for further control and operation of his Comstock holdings, Fair had extended his interests in the purchase of California real estate, chiefly in San Francisco. When the exhaustion of the big bonanza had been demonstrated, he turned his business energy to politics and railroad promotion, which went hand in hand in the California of the 'eighties.

In 1880 he was elected to the United States Senate on the Democratic ticket. About the same time he promoted and built the South Pacific Coast Railroad from San Francisco to San José and Santa Cruz. This line he sold to the Southern Pacific Company in 1887 for six million dollars.

Fair's ambition for a second term in the United States Senate was thwarted by defeat in the election of 1886. His social ambition and that of his wife, the Theresa Rooney whom he had won from the proprietorship of a boarding-house in Carson Hills some thirty years earlier, were still driving. They were soon to reach their peak of demonstration in the marriage of his eldest daughter Theresa to Herman Oelrichs of New York.

The account of that ceremony, occupying three profusely illustrated pages in the *San Francisco Examiner* of June 4, 1890, is a classic example of the

society reporting of the mauve decade which should be repeated in part to give an adequate idea of the glory to which a bonanza king could attain. The subsequent marriage of the second Fair daughter, Virginia, to William K. Vanderbilt, Jr., was pale in comparison. The entire city of San Francisco apparently took an interest, albeit a somewhat profane interest, in the Oelrichs-Fair nuptials.

"Before the sun had set over the Golden Gate last night eager crowds began to gather about Pine St., between Jones and Leavenworth to see the outward evidences of the famous marriage of Miss Fair to Herman Oelrichs of New York," said the inspired *Examiner* society reporter.

"Ever since the engagement was announced last January, society has been talking of the bride's beauty and the groom's fame, and while society was able to gratify a six months' expectation, those not of the magic circle contented themselves with the sight of the hurrying carriages which disgorged their contents of tulle, diamonds and broadcloth in hasty succession, with the dazzling lights that sparkled through every window of the great Fair mansion; with the great pavilion that rose in the garden like a swelling balloon; with the conservatory and its parti-colored lanterns, and above all with the knowledge that some moment before midnight the bride and groom, with that blush which is traditional to such affairs, would walk from the house door down the long flight of canvassed steps

under the searching of the great Brush lights to be hurried into a carriage, pelted with good-byes and whirled away to the Palace Hotel. . . .”

And so on for twenty thousand additional adjectives. That was a wedding. Neither James Graham Fair nor Theresa Rooney Fair were to excel it in the few years of glory which remained to them. It even gave Theresa Fair Oelrichs and later Virginia Fair Vanderbilt something to live up to in the social life of New York.

But interest in the Fair name and fortune were to be continued in other ways. James Fair had led too active a life to relax in indolence in his declining years. His interest and participation in the stock-market continued. Undeterred by the disastrous failure of the Mackay-Flood attempt to corner the wheat market in 1887, a failure which had brought him back into business as president of the tottering Nevada Bank, Fair took a whirl at the same game. And he also demonstrated that his genius was for mining, not for the wheat pit.

At his death, in December, 1894, it was discovered that he owned one hundred and sixty-five thousand tons of wheat. The sale which was required to settle the estate was made at a loss of millions. No such haste was necessary. The famous Fair trust will was to remain in the courts for six years of continuous litigation, during which the executors defended twenty-six separate suits and instituted sixty-seven.

That will is still famous in American jurisprudence. Its chief provisions were simply to provide three equal incomes from the estate in trust, to go to one son and the two daughters, or the daughters' children after them. But Mrs. Nettie R. Craven, a San Francisco school-teacher, who claimed to have been a sweetheart of the bonanza king, produced a pencil will of later date than the trust will, and the battle was on. For years its ramifications crowded the courts and newspapers. Nine decisions in the various suits were appealed to the California Supreme Court, four to federal courts, and one to the United States Supreme Court. Two-thirds of the way through the period of litigation the estate was appraised at \$12,228,998. By the time it was settled in favor of the heirs of kin it had grown to eighteen million dollars. In the face of the legal fees involved in ninety-three suits, that in itself is an item worthy of the fame of a bonanza king. And with that we may leave the four kings of the big bonanza, and take a final survey of the others whom the Comstock made rich and famous.

William Sharon's name is raised for the edification of posterity upon the Sharon Building in San Francisco, overlooking the new Palace Hotel, built after the earthquake and fire of 1906 upon the site of that original Palace which was the world's finest hotel, promoted by W. C. Ralston and completed by Sharon at a cost of six million, five hundred thousand dollars. That is the only tangible evidence of his former greatness. His heirs have not greatly distinguished

themselves, and his fortune has not been devoted to altruistic endeavors. Indeed, for a time it was the focus of one of the most widely heralded scandals in the social history of the West.

Sharon, though a cold and calculating man, was as ambitious socially as he was in politics and business. The reception which he gave at his Belmont estate in honor of his daughter Flora included in the guest list the names of Governor and Mrs. Leland Stanford, Mr. and Mrs. James G. Fair, Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Baldwin, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Crocker, Mr. and Mrs. Collis P. Huntington, Mr. and Mrs. George Hearst, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Requa, and a host of others of similar quality.

It may be imagined then what a sensation was promoted when a golden-haired beauty without other claim to fame sued for a share of the Sharon millions on the ground that she was the banker's wife by a contract marriage. Society was stirred to its gossip-loving heart by the action of Sarah Althea Hill. It was a scandal of large proportions. The woman was such a vivid beauty that she had become a well-known figure in the gay life of San Francisco, though not in the better social circles. Sharon's wife had been dead for several years when Sarah Althea Hill made her first sensational charges and demands.

The banker denied them flatly. He had never married Sarah Althea Hill, by contract or otherwise. He was a man in his sixties, with a daughter who was a sufficiently charming hostess even for the palace at

Belmont which he called home. He had no need for and no interest in a second wife. The allegations were blackmail. Sharon was still a fighter, as were all the men who had grown great through the Comstock.

But the golden-haired Sarah was also a fighter. Also she was a strategist. She engaged the legal services of another fighter with a notch on his gun. He was David S. Terry, the same Kentucky giant who had been a justice of the California Supreme Court in the 'fifties, who had killed Senator D. C. Broderick in a duel, who had led a group of southern adventurers in the fortification and armed defense of a disputed mine in the early days of the Comstock, who had opposed William M. Stewart for the mastery of mining juries in Virginia City, and who had sacrificed the probability of a bonanza fortune to fight through the Civil War with the Confederate Army.

Under Terry's direction, the fair Sarah Althea produced a copy of the contract marriage into which she claimed to have entered with Sharon. For two long years the battle surged through the courts of California. The newspapers reveled in the story. But at last the state Supreme Court, with Chief Justice Field presiding, declared the contract to be a forgery, and dismissed the action. Even then the story was not closed. Judge Terry married his beautiful client, and incidentally prepared the way for a melodramatic climax by publicly denouncing Justice Field as an improper person to try the case because of close and



long-standing friendship for the defendant, Sharon. Not satisfied with that, the fire-eating southerner threatened to "get" the Justice.

And that was the situation when Terry one day entered the railroad eating-station at Lathrop, in the San Joaquin Valley. Justice Field, with a body-guard whom he had kept beside him since Terry's threats had become public, was at his lunch. The guard declared later that Terry moved to draw a gun as soon as he saw Field. Perhaps he did. The action was too swift for others to be competent witnesses. The guard fired, and Terry crashed to the floor, dead. Perhaps the most entertaining scandal in the history of California was closed.

Sharon had not lived to see its finish. His own death had occurred in 1885. But another thrill had been added to the memory of the builder of the Comstock.

The great men were following the paths of glory to their inevitable conclusion. Sharon's most bitter enemy was becoming a notable figure in San Francisco as he had made himself notable in the Comstock. Adolph Sutro was a man who could scarcely escape the building of a permanent monument to his own character.

Nearly twenty years of desperate struggle on the Comstock had made Sutro a man to be reckoned with. But the long battle with Sharon and the continuation of the struggle with the four bonanza kings had not succeeded in destroying the versatility of Sutro's

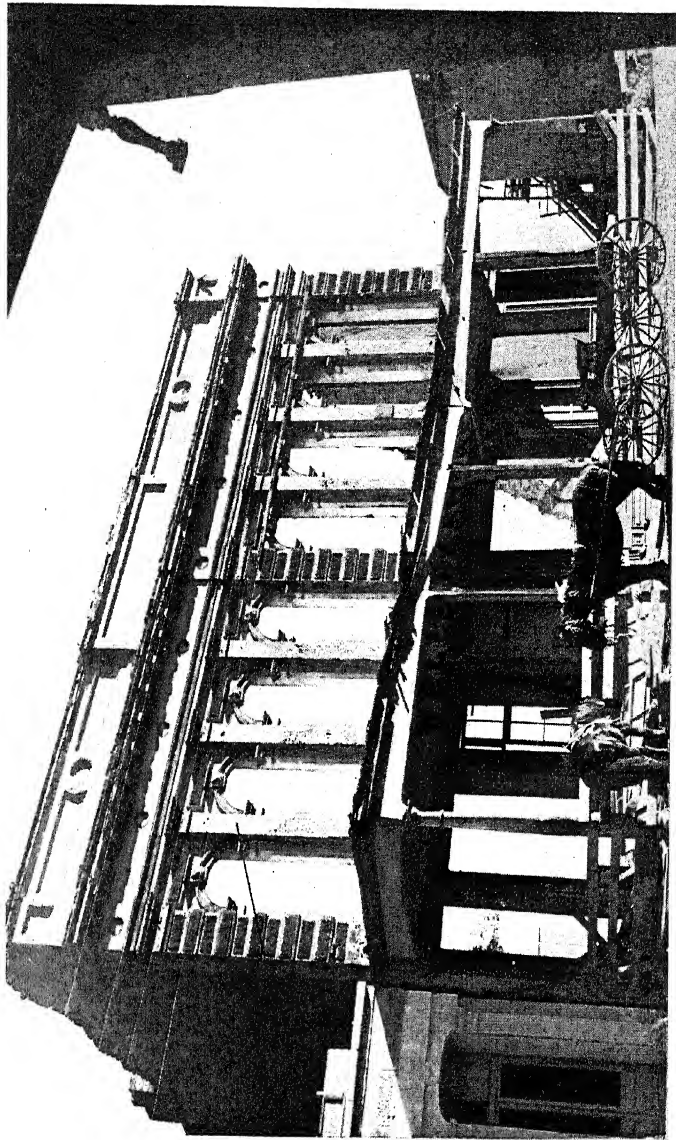
character. He had been a student, a dreamer and a builder since boyhood. With the fortune finally gained through the sale of his stock in the completed tunnel, Sutro removed to San Francisco. There he looked about for a field which might satisfy his energies. He found it in the undeveloped hills upon the northwest side of the city. There he purchased hundreds of acres of rolling sand-dunes, an estate upon the cliffs overlooking the Seal Rocks, and other acreage, and proceeded to reclaim and develop the wastes. Sutro Heights, Sutro Forest, Sutro Baths and the Cliff House, which have been a mecca for tourists as well as for residents of the bay region for half a century, were the result.

Not satisfied with reclamation, forestation and such development, Sutro simultaneously set about the collection of one of the world's finest libraries. For years he scoured Europe, in person and through agents, buying the rarest and most valuable books and manuscripts available. His purchases included the treasures of the great Sunderland library, sold by the Duke of Marlborough, the rarest volumes of the Carthusian monastery at Buxheim, and numerous other works equally rare. The collection quickly became famous among scientists and bibliophiles. It contained four thousand specimens of books printed prior to 1500 A.D., approximately one-seventh of all such books known in the world. It was rated in the 'nineties as the fourth most valuable library in America. And this invaluable treasure, as much a fruit of

the Comstock as the Mackay School of Mines, or the million-dollar check given by James Fair to Mrs. Herman Oelrichs, Adolph Sutro willed as a free gift to the public. After his death, and before the library had been properly housed, it was seriously depleted by the fire, storm and vandalism which followed the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. Still invaluable, however, a monument worthy of its donor, its remaining treasures are now the property of the State of California, housed in a branch of the State Library built for the purpose in the Civic Center of San Francisco.

But though a man of rare culture and originality of mind, Sutro was even more a fighter than the great Comstockers whose opposition he had at last defeated. It was an easy thing for him to be drawn from the sedentary delights of home and books into a battle with the Southern Pacific Railroad barons who controlled the street railways of San Francisco. Through this battle he was lured on to accept the mayoralty of his adopted city. And through it again he engaged in a final struggle with the railroad kings, Huntington, Stanford, Hopkins and Crocker over the Funding Bills which divided Congress in a bitter warfare in the last years of the last century. It was a struggle in which Adolph Sutro branded the railroad builders as grafters of the most arrogant type.

Their purpose was to delay for fifty years the repayment, without interest, of twenty-seven million dollars advanced to them for construction of the first transcontinental railroad. Sutro proved that they



*Curtis Studio, Reno, Nevada.*

ALL THAT IS LEFT OF THE WELLS, FARGO & COMPANY BUILDING AT VIRGINIA CITY.

Part of the old brick and iron safe may be seen through the broken doorway under the left of the wooden awning. The building itself is sinking rapidly into the underground labyrinth which gave it birth.



had paid the bulk of this money into their own pockets through construction companies organized to handle the job. And in the end, largely through Sutro's violent efforts, the government recovered the money, with interest. It was a sensational struggle, and one which kept the tunnel builder's name even more prominently before the public than that of the bonanza kings, long after his death in San Francisco in 1898.

And through the same years the last of the great Comstockers was justifying himself in the eyes of posterity. John P. Jones, who had brought Virginia City out of its most serious depression by the opening of the Crown Point bonanza in 1871, perhaps deserves a greater fame as a king of the Comstock than he has had. Though a practical mining man of extraordinary ability, Jones was at heart a promoter and business man of wider vision than any of his associates in Virginia City.

With the fortune which came to him through the Crown Point bonanza, he promptly broadened his field of activity. Having been elected from Nevada to the United States Senate in 1873, Jones quit the active superintendency of the Crown Point, and devoted himself to politics. His record for accomplishment in the Senate is not especially notable except with regard to mining legislation, but either the record or his personal popularity kept him in the office continuously for thirty years.

In the same period he found time for other activ-

ities which won and lost him many times the profits of the Crown Point bonanza, and left his mark permanently upon the Pacific Coast. Minor promotions included huge ice plants in Atlanta, New Orleans and Dallas, and the reclamation of twelve thousand acres of flood land in the Napa and Sonoma creek bottoms.

But his chief interest always was in mining. Thus he became interested in a silver prospect in the Panamint Mountains on the western side of Death Valley, and in mines at Kernville, in Tulare County. The Panamint promotion led to the development of the seaside town of Santa Monica, now known to hundreds of thousands of southern California tourists. Senator Jones became the town's first and greatest benefactor. The lovely park upon its palisades, which looks over the palatial seaside homes of Marion Davies, Jesse Lasky, Louis Mayer, Mary Pickford, Joseph Schenck, to Santa Monica Bay with Catalina in the distance, is the gift of John P. Jones to his city.

Senator Jones believed the Panamint mines would rival the Comstock. He recalled vividly the wealth and power which had come to William Sharon through his monopolistic control of all the chief activities of Virginia City and the district. The Panamints offered as fair an opportunity. With Colonel R. S. Baker, Jones purchased control of the San Vicente ranch which stretched from the open fields surrounding the village of Los Angeles to the great bluffs above the Pacific. He would connect the Pana-

mints by rail with the ocean, build a pier for ocean-going ships, and control a greater project than even Sharon had dreamed.

The town site of Santa Monica was laid out. The pier was built. But the Panamint mines failed to materialize. The by-product of Senator Jones' dream perforce became its chief product. Santa Monica grew and thrived. Coasting steamers used the wharf long before the federal development of San Pedro harbor. Growing wealth in the near-by Los Angeles stirred the ambition and interest of its owners in summer homes above the beach. The city developed, and Senator Jones recovered the fortune which he had lost in the barren slopes to the west of Death Valley.

In 1888 he built a great rambling home upon the cliffs, and called it Miramar. It stands to-day, a hotel of which its builder could, but might not, be proud.

And to this end of his path of glory Senator John P. Jones came in November, 1912, last and oldest of the leaders of the Comstock.

A peaceful death must always be an anti-climax to lives so full. But the memories of the bonanza days defy such anticlimax. They must remain deathless.

THE END





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